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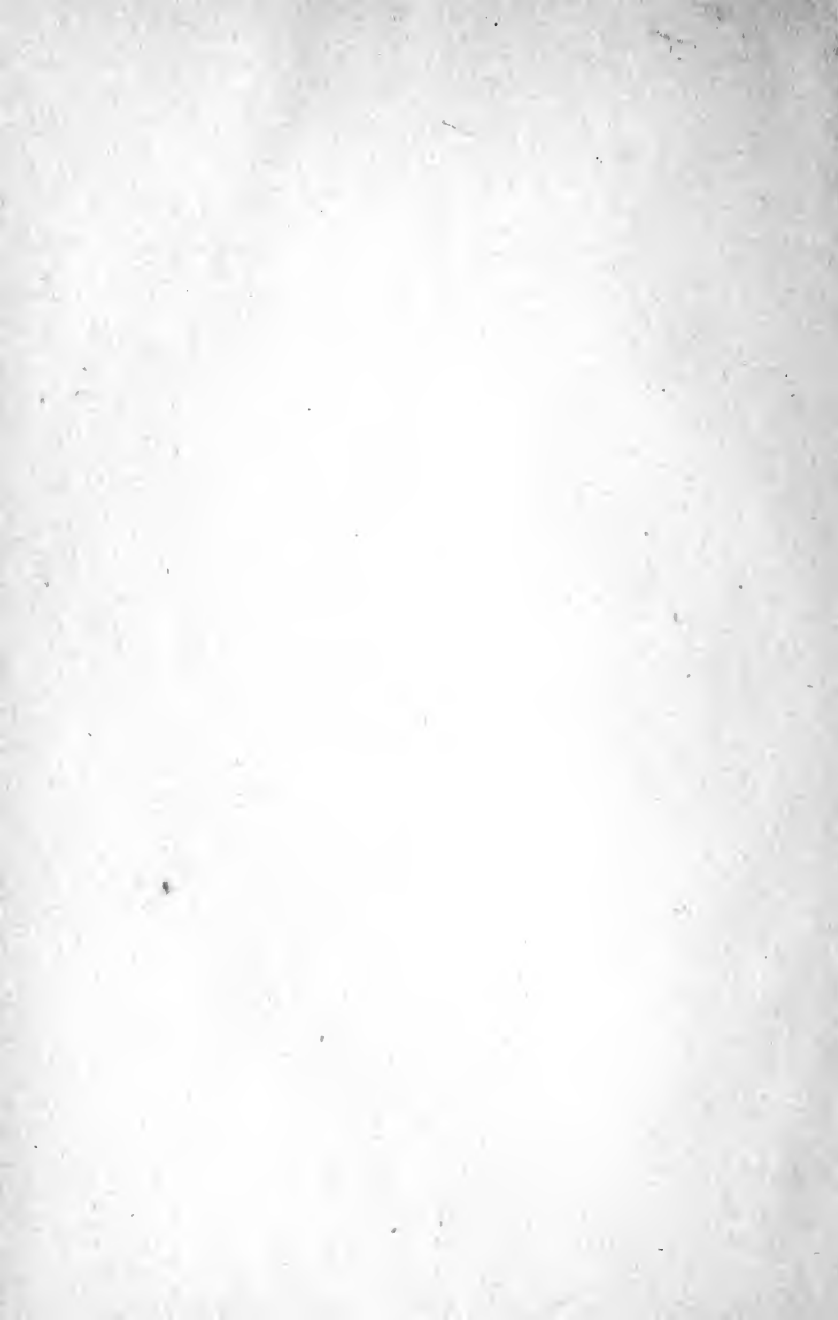
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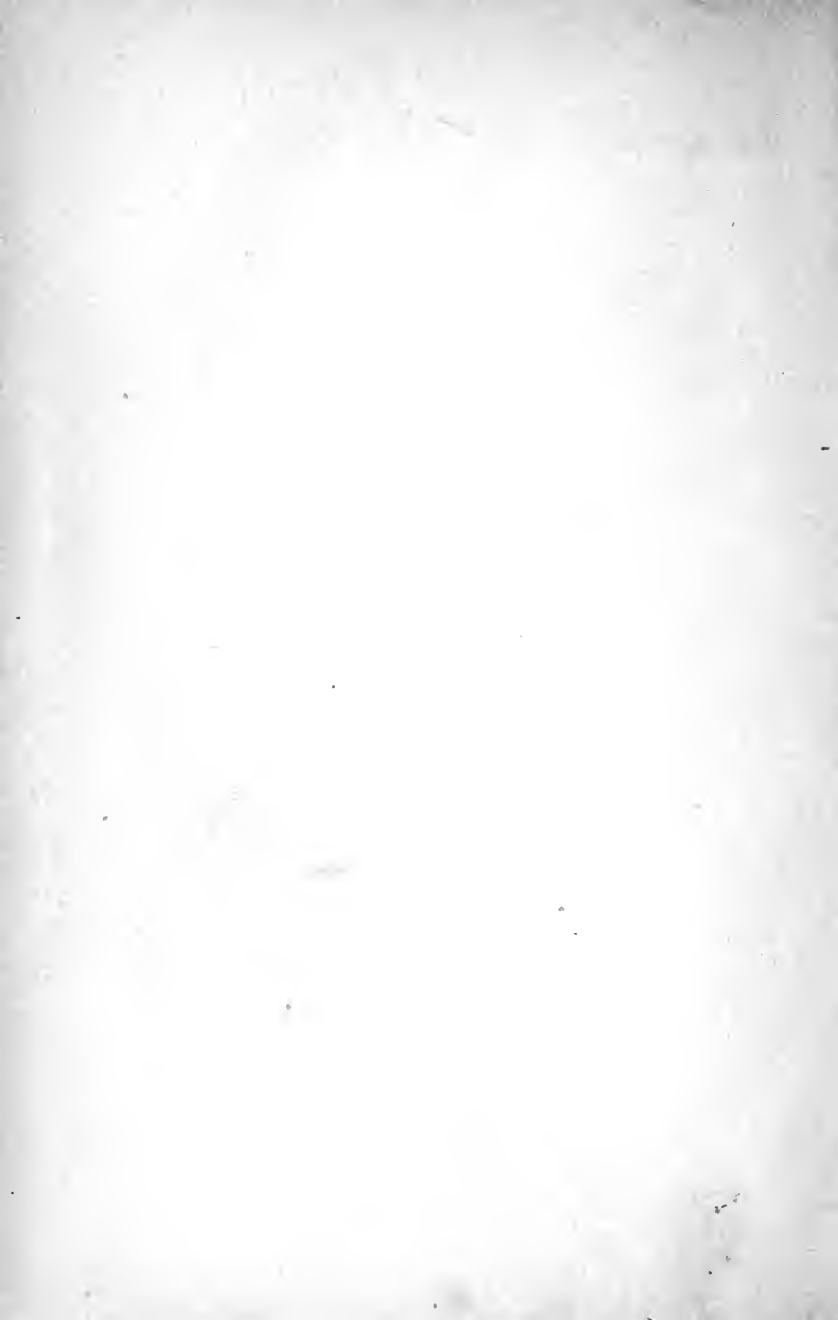
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THE SON OF HIS FATHER.

VOL. II.



THE SON OF HIS FATHER

BY

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“IT WAS A LOVER AND HIS LASS,” “AGNES,”

“THE LAIRD OF NORLAW,”

ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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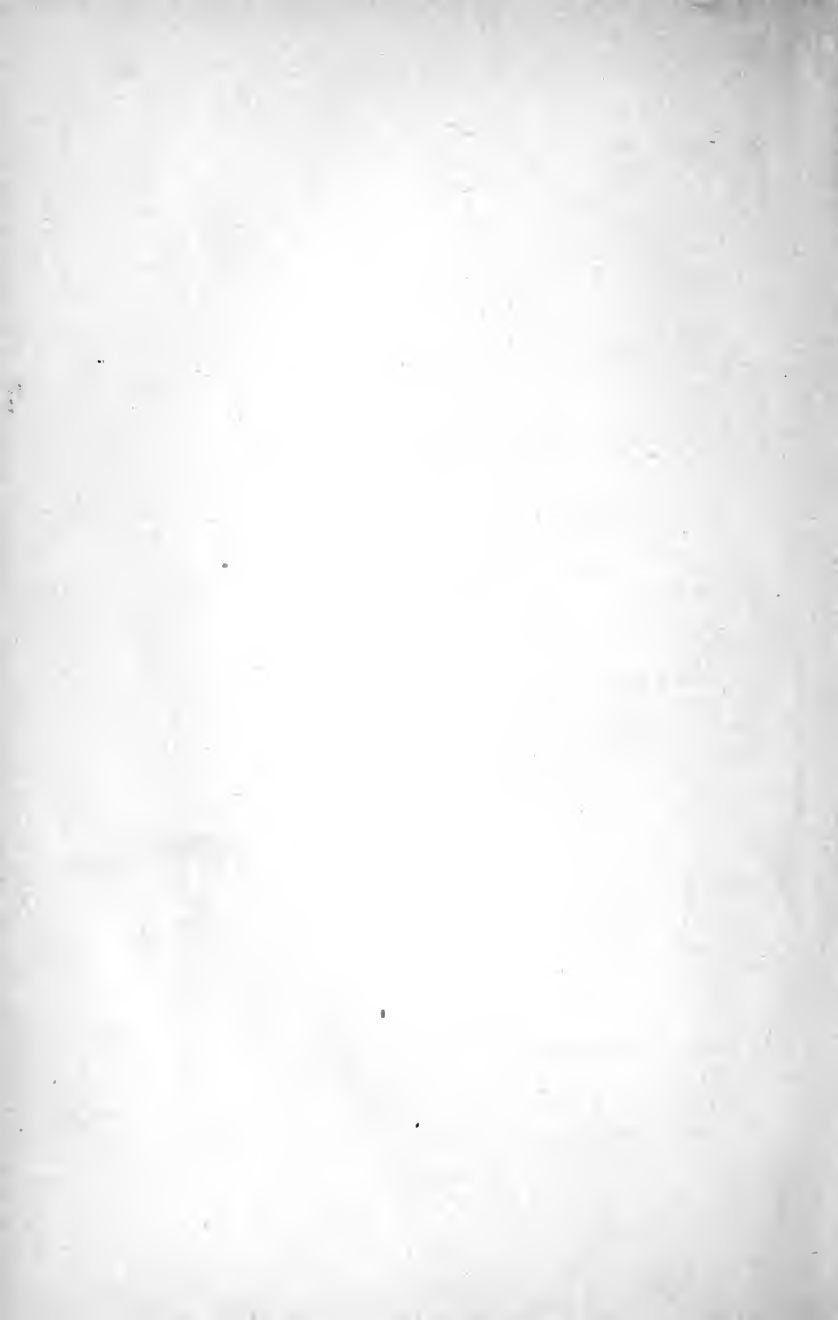
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THE SON OF HIS FATHER.

CHAPTER I.

OUT IN THE WORLD.

OUT in the world.

It was not so long a journey as that he had taken to Liverpool with the curate, but how different it was! Then he had his home to return to; he had set forth curious indeed and interested, with a hope of discovering something about himself, but always with the idea of going back to the quiet of his own life and working it out. He had his natural anchorage, his harbour to sail back to, and no need to think of facing by himself the storms of life. He had not been happy then; but even his sadness, his trouble, even the mystery thrown into his life, his dis-

quietude, all these were so different. That was only a sort of amateur trouble, a playing at distress. Now it enveloped him on every side. He sat down opposite to his mother in the railway carriage, and saw everything that he had known gliding away from him, disappearing into the distance. He did not know where he was going, or to what. She said nothing to him, not a word of his home, or of his new life; and his old had come to an end, as if he had died.

As if he had died! In some ways it would have been more satisfactory to have died. Then his name and memory, the name which he knew best, without any mystery attached to it, would always have remained in the same place, and the whole village would have been sorry, and talked of him with bated breath, shaking their heads in sympathy. Poor boy, to have died so young! and Elly and the boys would have looked after his grave. Elly at least would have done it. She would never have forgotten. Tears came into John's eyes when he thought of Elly going with her flowers to his grave, crying a little, never forgetting him. He made

a little picture to himself, in which he saw her leaning over the turf, arranging her posy to his memory: and his eyes moistened with sadness which had in it an exquisite sort of melancholy pleasure. For after all it is not so dreadful for the very young to contemplate dying: the violets on their grave breathe to them a great consolation and the thought of the universal sympathy; they have not got so engrafted into life, so determined in all its habits as their elders. But when John turned to the other side, and found himself facing that blank world of the unknown—not knowing what he was to do, having, so to speak, no say in it, depending entirely upon what She should decide—there was no consolation at all in it, nothing that corresponded to the violets on the grave.

He did not know how his life was to be shaped, where he was to go, what he was to do. She had brought away a few things with her, but very few—grandmamma's work-basket, in which she had kept her knitting, and in which, had John had his will, the last unfinished piece of that knitting should have been kept for ever—a selection of the books which she had made

carefully, rejecting so many that grandfather had been proud of, and which she had said were of no use : but they would have been of use to John : an old picture or two from the walls, portraits with which John had been acquainted all his life, and one little old-fashioned bureau of carved wood, which had always stood in a corner, which he had never seen opened, and to which she seemed to attach great importance. These, with some of the old lady's boxes, were all she brought away. And John had to come out of the house, leaving it as if the old people might come in from their walk at any moment. Had it been pulled to pieces first he thought it would have been less dreadful : but probably had that been done, and all the old furniture scattered, he would have thought it worse still. Everything had the aspect of being the worst that could happen in his present state of mind. Mr. Cattley came to the station to say good-bye. He was very civil to Mrs. Sandford, but he grasped John's hand without a word.

‘ You'll write,’ he said, just as the train glided away. And the porters touched their hats and said ‘ Good-bye, Mr. John,’ with a kind

recollection of sixpences past. And so the boy disappeared from Edgeley, and his early life ended as if he had died, only that the severance was still more complete.

There was very little said until they drew near the great smoke which was London, and which roused a little excitement in John's fatigued bosom, as it began to stain the sky so long before they arrived. It was almost night when they reached the great bustling crowded station—dusk at least, the lamps beginning to twinkle, the air growing cold which had been almost warm in spring brightness in the earlier part of the day. Mrs. Sandford had all her packages collected and placed on a cab, with little assistance from John, who was bewildered and confused by all the commotion and tumult, people running against him on all sides, and shrieking at each other. She was perfectly collected, business-like, and calm, understanding exactly what to do, and evidently accustomed to manage everything for herself; and the officials about seemed to recognise her, and were particularly ready and assiduous in her service. She made John get into the cab

before her, like a child, and told the cabman where to drive; and it was only when they began this last brief part of their journey that she gave him any information as to where he was going.

‘It is time I should tell you,’ she said, ‘that I cannot have you to live with me, John. I should perhaps have said this before. I don’t know whether you are aware what my occupation is, though of course you have always addressed your letters to me at the hospital.’

John looked with quickened interest at the close black bonnet and cloak, perceiving their difference from other people’s bonnets and cloaks as if for the first time. It was not for the first time. He had remarked it at once and always, feeling the difference. But then, in her, everything was different.

‘I know,’ he said, ‘the letters were always addressed to the hospital.’

‘That is my profession,’ she said; ‘I am the matron. I had to take to that when I was left alone. I had two children to provide for, and myself worse than penniless. I don’t say this to claim your pity. I have always been quite

able for my work, and it suited me. An idle woman I never could have been——’

There was nothing left for him to say. He might, perhaps, have shown a little feeling—for he had never heard anything about working women, and recognised it as the natural state of affairs that they should stay at home ; but she quenched any sentimentality of that sort at once.

‘And then my father and mother took you off my hands,’ she said, with the same composure, ‘so that I was perfectly free. For, of course, Susie could go with me anywhere. I have been in the hospital for nine years. My rooms are very comfortable—for Susie and me: but I could not take you there. I have got lodgings for you close by.’

‘Oh,’ said John. He thought it was a relief to hear this, but then fell back upon himself bitterly, feeling that it was a new wrong and misery. No home, not even the semblance of a shelter, no place that belonged to him. It struck him with a sense of misery and shame.

‘It is too late to take you with me, even for tea—the hours and rules are naturally very

strict ; but I have ordered everything for you. You will find it quite comfortable. You will have enough to do unpacking and settling yourself to-night, and to-morrow at ten you may come to the hospital. If Susie had been able, she would have come to assist us, but this is one of the busy days. She must have had a great deal to do.'

'Is Susan—working in the hospital, too?'

'She helps me. She is very good, very serviceable—being a girl, she fits into everything, and spares me a great deal of trouble.'

'And I suppose I fit into nothing,' said John.

'It is a pity you should take it up in that way ; but it is true enough. A woman and her daughter can go anywhere. They are sure to be able to help each other. But a boy is quite different, as you say.'

Nothing further was said for a time, and John swallowed as best he could the bitterness that filled his mind. It was like a flood which rose and drowned every other sensation. Was he then of no use, a mere encumbrance, he whom everybody had looked upon as a boy who was going to do great things? The contrast of all

that had been, with all that now was, became more and more bitter. He broke silence again after two or three clearings of his throat.

‘I hope, though I am so useless to you, and only a burden, that I may get something to do at least. I—must do something. I cannot be unpacking and settling myself all my life.’

‘Don’t be afraid,’ said his mother. ‘I encourage idleness in no one. Here we are at your lodgings. You had better get down your boxes yourself, with the aid of the cabman. There is only a maid-of-all-work in the house.’

John stumbled out of the carriage in haste and bitterness of soul. The cab had stopped at the door of an old-fashioned red brick house, looking small but pleasant enough, with a very white doorstep, and a woman standing in the doorway who smiled and nodded her much-adorned cap at him by way of welcome. He snatched his boxes from the cabman’s hands and carried them in himself almost with violence, which was a little safety-valve to him, and worked off the passionate perturbation of his spirit. Mrs. Sandford got out too, and walked into the little front parlour, which opened on

one side of the door. On the opposite side of the street there was a great sombre building, with rows of lighted windows rising high over the level of this little row of houses, and the only prospect visible from them. Mrs. Sandford cast the quick look of a person in authority round the room.

‘You had better take down those curtains,’ she said. ‘He will be better without them; they are mere traps for dust, and keep out the fresh air. I hope you have arranged everything else as I told you.’

‘I’ve made everything as nice as I could,’ said the smiling woman; ‘and I hope as the young gentleman will be ’appy with me.’

‘I hope I may have reason to be satisfied with your treatment of him. You know, Mrs. Williams, I have something in my power.’

‘Oh, la, yes, mum! I knows that,’ said the woman, in a tone of alarm: and then she made John a curtsy, picking up her smile again with an air of having put it into a corner for a moment, which would have amused him had he been able to be touched by such light thoughts.

He had in the meantime thrust the boxes which contained his own property into the little bedroom beyond, which opened with folding doors from the parlour, and it was the glimpse this afforded which had prompted the remark about the curtains, grim articles of hard red woollen stuff, which half covered the windows of the inner room.

Mrs. Sandford gave another glance around her. The table in the centre of the room was partially covered with a cloth, and laid apparently for that meal which is called a heavy tea. There was a plate of ham, a quantity of watercress, a pat of butter, and a little loaf, and by the side of all this a battered old tea-tray with the japanning half worn off, on which were the tea things, the big cup and saucer and jug of blue milk, familiar to the dwellers in London lodgings. Mrs. Sandford cast a glance at all this with apparent satisfaction.

‘It is not what you have been used to,’ she said; ‘but it is not bad for the kind of thing. I hope you will be able to make yourself comfortable here. Susie will come and see you if

she can to-night, and to-morrow at ten I shall expect you at the hospital. I must go now. Good-night.'

She paused a moment, turned back, laid her hand on his shoulder, and kissed him lightly on the forehead. It was the first time she had done so, and John had a feeling that it was because of the presence of the spectator, who might have made remarks upon the cold parting of the mother and son—this thought gave him a feeling of horror and repulsion not to be described. He grew red, as with a sense of insult. She had come to the place where she was known, and kissed him to keep up appearances. The youth could have struck her as he drew his cheek away.

Perhaps she too felt that what she had done was not natural. She withdrew too with something like an angry colour rising over her features. Motives are so mixed, and human sentiments so complex. Perhaps it was because of the presence of that spectator that she had kissed her son; and yet there were many other feelings in her mind; quiverings of long-suppressed emotion, and an impulse in which there were many

tender elements. But she saw what he thought, and there was enough truth in it to make it a new sting to her that he should have thought so. She went away back to her cab without another word, and he stood and watched while it crossed the street and drew up at a door a short distance off, a side door in the great building with its many lights. There he stood gazing while the cabman delivered his load of packages. He ought to have helped, perhaps; to have gone with her and seen her safely landed. But he stood instead at a distance, looking on with unfriendly eyes, with his mother's kiss still burning and stinging. How strange that it should be so! He stayed there till she had disappeared with all her goods, and the cab had driven away; then returned to the little parlour of his lodgings alone.

It was a great wonder to him to find himself there, and to think that he was in London, in the heart of the great place to which every man's eyes are turned, where everything is to be done, where all that is pleasant and gay, and all that is noisy and terrible, are going on. He had perhaps thought, even in his subdued state,

even under the chilling shadow of his mother's wing, something of this kind. However subdued one may be, however little desire one may have for amusement or commotion, yet in London it is inevitable that one should be amused and excited. It comes, in spite of one's self, in the mere clamour of so much life, in the bustle of the streets, in the noise and riot. So he had thought, as so many think every day. But what had really happened to John in London was that he had fallen into the completest stillness, a quiet more than the quiet of the village, a loneliness such as he had never known before. His landlady had lighted two candles on the table. She had drawn down the blind, shutting out a bit of daffodil sky, the last lingering of day in the midst of the coming night. All was shut up, above, without—and John was alone.

What a form for novelty to take, for the first night of London, for the excitement of a new life! He sank down upon the hard horse-hair sofa, and looked round with speechless dismay. Here he was shut up as in a box, closed in, as if he were in a prison. In a prison it would almost be more cheerful; you would be aware,

at least, of a host of other minds, of other hearts beating. Here there was nothing. A little parlour, with a little bed-room behind ; a landlady, with nodding ribbons in her cap ; a door which shuts out the world. It was like waking up after a night of fiery dreams, and finding yourself shut in a closet, separated from everything—the blind drawn, the door closed, the room shut up, and the young victim all alone.

CHAPTER II.

LONDON.

HE had eaten, for he was hungry, and ham and bread and butter are not to be despised when nothing better is to be had. Even, which was curious to his state of mind, he had eaten largely, putting up before him the railway book which he had not read on his journey, and going on unconsciously with his vigorous, youthful appetite. This, the first act of his solitude, was by no means so disagreeable as he had feared. It increased his personal comfort, for he had eaten scarcely anything all day, and the increase of personal comfort ameliorates everything. When he had finished, he carried one of his candles to a small table near the window, and sat down there and read on, finishing his book, which had interested him. When he had closed it, and

laid it on the table, the realisation of all the circumstances, which returned to his mind, was not so heavy as the first time. His heart began to spring up again, after being crushed under the foot of fate. It began to throb and tingle with the thought that he was in London, on the border of everything that was most living and desirable. The little fumes of interest of his story increased the effect by soothing away his personal misery. And now, as he sat in the small, silent room, something came to him which he had been conscious of all along, without knowing what it was, a sound continuous, like the far-off sound of the sea or of the wind, but subdued, as though the storm was far off, a sound which, now that he was free from those claims made by his lowered bodily condition upon his mind, became more and more apparent, filling the air with an uninterrupted murmur. What was it?

He sat up and listened, and then, with an excitement which made his heart jump, he recognised what it was. It was London! Had he not read in many a book of that great, low volume of sound, which some people described

as the sound of many waters, and some as the distant roar of a tempest. It was soft here in his little hermitage, amid the strange solitude and silence, but rolled and murmured continuous, never ending. He perceived now that he had noticed it from the first moment, that all along he had wondered when it would stop, vaguely disquieted by it without knowing what it was; and now he knew that it would never stop, that it was the breath of the great multitude, the hum of their endless going on and on. John sat and listened to it till it went to his head, exciting him like wine. He could not rest. The contrast of this little prison-chamber in which he sat, and all that was implied in that low, continuous roar and hum of men, stirred his imagination more and more. He got up and opened the window, and looked out. Opposite to him was the great mass of building dark against the sky, which seemed to oppress and stifle the neighbourhood, taking away the air: but outside of that, away across the river where the world was, the hum, the roar, the continuous roll of sound came stronger and stronger. It called upon the young soul which stood and

throbbed and listened. He had the habits of his youth and innocence strong upon him—a sort of unspoken sense of duty that restrained him and kept him from following his own impulses. It was not till some time had elapsed that he began to think it possible to obey that call—to go out and see what it was which gave forth that mighty voice. When the thought entered his mind it filled all his veins with excitement. Should he go? Why should he not go? No word had been said to him to bind him to remain where he was. It was not to waste day and night shut up in a dreary little room that he had come to London. He looked round upon the blank, grey walls, and found their bondage intolerable. It was like a box in which he was shut up. His brain and his veins seemed to be swelling, bursting with life that must have an outlet somehow. No, certainly, he could not stay there. He must have air and room to breathe; he must see for himself what was meant by London. But John, even in his excitement, was prudent. He put away his watch—which was not the one Mrs. Egerton had given him, but the old, dear silver

one, the one that had no value at all and yet so great a value. He was aware that in London the natural thing was to rob a countryman, to take his watch from him. He would not expose his treasure to such a risk; but when he had laid that away he felt, with confidence, that there was nothing else to lose. They might hustle or knock him down, if they could, but there was nothing else they could do to him. Nevertheless, it was with something of that warlike exhilaration, with which a struggle is foreseen at his age, that John buttoned his coat and took his hat. He felt that 'they' (though he had not the least notion who *they* might be) would not have an easy bargain of him.

He went out without even being remarked. No 'Where are you going?' 'When will you come back?' to impede his liberty. That fact also went to his heart a little. He had felt his loneliness very forlorn—now he felt it exciting, exhilarating. He set his hat firmly on his head, and drew a long breath when he felt the fresh air of the night, so different from that of any parlour, encircle him with its coolness and vastness. That, too, has an intoxication in it which

everything that is young acknowledges. The air may be sober in the morning—it is like wine at night. The darkness has a mystery, a magic in it—the lights twinkling through it—the world made into something ideal, in which miracles are. John stood still for a moment at the door, realising that he was there, that he was unshackled—his own master—and then, drawn by the great voice that called and called him, he turned his face towards the distant blazing of the lights, and set out—to discover that new world.

To discover London! how many do it every day, with hearts beating high, with hopes immeasurable, which so often collapse and come to nothing; but this is not the time for moralising. John set out. His way began in the darkness of this little street, with its little houses, faced by the great sombre shadow of the hospital, which shut out the air from it and the sky. He plunged into the darkness at first, making his way between rows of insignificant buildings, with a feeble shop here and there flashing its faint illumination, and then, with a great sweep of fresh air seizing him, came out upon the

bridge. The sky was full of the clearness of spring, though there was no moon. The river flowed dark and silent below, faintly visible further up the stream in pale streaks of reflection, across which would rise a dark and ghostly shadow of something floating, a barge, a heavy blackness in the middle of the faint light; but lamps blazing overhead, the glare of gas, and here and there the chill contradictory artificial moon of the electric light 'swearing' horribly, as the French say, with all the yellow lamps around. The murmur of sound grew and grew as the boy went on; it was a rhythmic roar as of waves beating against a shore, or the rush of a prodigious waterfall, a great moral Niagara, bigger than any physical falls, however gigantic. It was made up of the sounds of carriages of every description, of voices, the hum of the crowd constantly broken by some shrill interruption of a cry or shout, which gave emphasis to the general continual, unfailing current of sound. He hurried along, quickening his pace, led by it as if it had been a syren's song.

On the other side of the river a noble mass of walls and towers rose against the night. He guess-

ed what it was, and his heart beat high. Then suddenly he was over the bridge, he was in it, in the very crowd itself, among the thunder of the carriages, the perpetual movement of the passengers, the very heart of London—he thought even, in awe, holding his breath—of the world. Was that Parliament? He got as near as he could and watched the carriages, the heads appearing at the windows, men in whose hands was the fate of the world. John felt as if he had some hand in it all as he watched them dashing up to the doorway, sometimes cheered, with a running fire of remark volleying about from the voices of the crowd. It was all so unusual, that he could scarcely make out at first what the people about him said; and, when he understood the words, he did not understand the allusions, not knowing who the members were or anything but that they were members, and therefore surrounded with a halo of wonder and interest. Presently one of the men standing near began to perceive his ignorance and curiosity, and to offer explanations. But John was not so simple as that, he said to himself. He knew that the danger of London was to listen

to people who expressed themselves benevolently towards you, and wanted to give you information. He withdrew accordingly from that spot, and by-and-by, feeling that there were still other worlds beyond, left this scene of overwhelming interest altogether, promising himself that he would look up all the prints in the shop windows, and so learn to identify the members of parliament himself.

The dark shadow to his right hand was that of the Abbey. He held his breath with awe, but he was in no mood for the silence and darkness. He followed the roar and crush of the crowd through a dark, broad, vacant street or two until he emerged into another kind of blaze and din, into the tumult and bustle and noise and commotion of the Strand. Here the shops, the lights, the wild confusion of traffic, the hoarse cries, the flare and glare and riot, the wild medley of life, the wretched figures in squalid groups, the gentlemen passing with evening dress under their overcoats, the ragged and shouting vendors of the newspapers, the crowds rushing to the theatres, the other crowds that hung upon their steps and importuned them

with unnecessary services, ended in turning altogether John's young and unaccustomed brain. He was hustled by the ceaseless stream of people rushing past him in both ways, coming and going, and after a while felt himself like a straw upon a river, carried along without knowing where he was going, tossed into a corner, seized again by the stream, swept away breathless, with a strange pleasure and wonder and disgust and incomprehension. He was doing nothing but gazing, looking on wondering where they were all going, what they all meant, what need there was to hurry so, to shout so; and yet he felt as if he too were living, as he never before had lived all his life.

Strange illusion; an older man perhaps would have concluded that here was no real life at all, but only a fantastic, half-conscious dream. Half the people streaming along were doing it by no will of their own, but only because of the treadmill action of habit, which made them fancy this way of spending the evening the natural thing to do—and that to go somewhere, to do something, as they said—that is to frequent noisy places in which the

depth of dulness was touched, yet where rampant, folly extracted a strained laugh—or to bustle out and in of swinging doors, and exchange jests at bars, and rub shoulders with crowds, coming and going—was life. It was life indeed for the poor hangers-on greedy for pence or sixpences, to the poor hawkers of miserable merchandises, to the servants of the crowd. To them it was fatigue, cold, disappointment, weary waiting, miserable snatches at recompense, eager greed, and accumulation and gain; bread, perhaps to poor little children in squalid rooms somewhere about, or whisky at the street corners—at all events, a real yet possible existence, the only one of which they were conscious or capable. The more wretched in such scenes have the advantage of the less. The newspaper boy, the girl with her poor basket of faded flowers, the hundred other vassals of the crowd are real in their poor work and competition. It is their masters, the lords of unrule, who are the ghosts.

John, driven hither and thither by the currents of passengers, happily was as unaware as a woman of the darker and more horrible dangers

of the streets. No squalid siren smiled for him; he did not understand these profounder depths. But the confusion and the noise, and the strange contrast of pleasure and wretchedness, the carriages passing, with pretty glimpses of white figures bound for the theatres, the groups of the ragged and miserable on the pavement, the whole resounding, conflicting, moving world gave him a sort of intoxication, so that he scarcely knew what he was about, or where he was.

He had got in front of one of the theatres in the midst of a crowd more noisy than usual, the pavement encumbered with poor and squalid spectators, with men shrieking their wares to sell, and pushing books of words into the carriage windows, the confusion of cabs and carriages greater than ever, when John was suddenly roused out of all this phantasmagoria to something real. As he stood gazing, his eyes suddenly fell upon a group at the entrance of the theatre, a man with a tall, shiny hat, and coat buttoned up to his throat, with a woman somewhat fantastically but poorly dressed, on his arm. They were standing to see the people

get out of their carriages, with looks somewhat wistful, as if envious of the pleasure the others were about to enjoy. The man, who was tall, inspected the ladies with a smile half patronising, half satirical. But the wife looked pathetically, wistfully, with an envy which was not bitter, nor bore any trace of unkindness. They were standing close together, rapt in that sight. At the woman's feet was a child, holding fast by her skirts. While the parents gazed, something caught the eye of the little girl, a flower which somebody had dropped out of the window of a carriage. The little thing made one spring, while the absorbed attention of her parents was fixed upon the play-goers, and secured the prize out of the mud of the street, but not before the prancing horse of a hansom, drawn back suddenly upon its haunches, was dashing its hoofs into the air over her head. There was a universal shriek and commotion, in the midst of which the mother put down her hand instinctively but tranquilly to grasp the child. Then, finding it absent, she gave a wild cry, and turned round with arms wildly waving, facing the crowd. John took no time to think. He

was the nearest, or thought himself so, and he was pushed forward by the shrieking crowd. He flung himself on the child, caught it, tossed it back to some one, he could not tell whom—but fell forward with the impetus. He felt a sharp touch on his head like a knife, and then no more—till he came to himself with the sensation of a crowd round him, and of cool applications applied to his head, which seemed to burn under the hands of some one who was leaning over him.

‘It will be nothing, it will be nothing,’ he heard some one say; and then, ‘A wonderful escape,’ ‘It might have killed him,’ in different tones. It seemed to John at first to be but another scene in that bewildering phantasmagoria through which he had been walking. When he opened his eyes he found that he was in an apothecary’s shop, which was crowded with people, faces everywhere filling up the window outside, piled one upon another. Close to him stood the man in the tall and very shiny hat. John caught in it the reflection of the great blue and red bottles in the window, and burst into a feeble laugh.

‘Gently, gently, you’re all right: but there’s nothing to laugh about,’ some one said.

‘Where am I?’ said John, still fascinated by the reflection.

‘Me dear young gentleman, ye have done a heroic action. Ye’ve behaved like a hero. Ye’ve saved me child,’ said the man in the hat.

‘Now stand back. Let him have plenty of air. Try if you can stand,’ said another voice.

John stood up, but felt faint and giddy. It seemed ridiculous in a few minutes to change from the robust village youth who feared nothing to a creature whose head seemed to swim independent of him, and who could not steady himself. He caught at the arm of the tall man to support himself.

‘That’s right, that’s right, me noble boy. I’ll take him home with me. The child is unhurt, me young hero. She’s waiting out o’ doors with her mother, who’s longing to embrace ye and bless ye. Come, it’s but a step to me humble door.’

John was not quite clear about this address, but he was glad of the tall man’s arm, on which he could lean, and allowed himself to be led

away in a dazed condition through the crowd, followed by the woman and the child, who was still crying with fright and excitement. The mother, happily, neither embraced nor blessed him, but he was so dazed that he scarcely knew what happened, except that she looked at him anxiously, with troubled eyes. He was glad of the support of the man, who guided him very kindly for a little way through the crowded street, then suddenly turned down a quiet one. Here the waft of a purer, colder air upon John's face brought him to himself, and he would have drawn his arm from that of his guide.

‘I can go now,’ he said, ‘thank you. I’m myself, now——’

‘What, let you go like this—the saviour of me child’s life—when we’re close to our humble door? Never!’ said his new friend. ‘Maria, go first and light a candle—you’ve got the key——’

And presently John found himself, after stumbling up several flights of stairs, in a room high up, very shabbily and sparsely furnished, where there was a glimmer of fire, and where he was not unwilling to sit down and rest, though his

senses had come back to him, and he began to recover from the shock. While he sat looking round him, vaguely wondering with his still slightly clouded faculties where he was, and if, perhaps, he might have fallen into some of the traps he had read of, the couple talked a little in whispers behind him. Was it of him they were talking? Were they consulting together what to do with him? He smiled to himself even while he half entertained this thought. Then one innocent word came to his ears which made him laugh to himself. It was 'sausages.' John, in his most suspicious mood, in the deepest alarms of the country lad, could not suppose that they meant to make sausages of him. The sound of his laugh startled both himself and the little group behind him. The woman hurried away, and the man came forward with the grand air which sat so strangely on his evident poverty.

'Ye laugh, me young friend,' he said. 'Perhaps ye overheard our consultations how to receive ye, our young benefactor. It is not much at present that is in Montessor's power, but what we have is at your service to the last

sou. I am not an ungrateful, though ye see in me a fallen man. Did ye see the crowds at that theatre door? Young sir, a few years ago it was to see Montessor those crowds—and there were more, more! than are ever drawn now—that those crowds flowed in to boxes, pit, and gallery, and not a scrap of paper, but all solid money throughout the house.’

John but dimly understood, but yet had a glimmering of what was meant.

‘Are you Montessor?’ he said.

Montessor lifted his hands, in one of which was still the shiny hat, to heaven—or rather to the low, smoke-darkened ceiling which was its substitute.

‘Me downfall is indeed proved,’ he said, ‘me young friend, when ye have to ask that question. Me portrait was once in all the shop windows: but now——’ The arms were raised again, and then Montessor put down his hat and drew a chair towards the waning fire, which he poked gently and with precaution. ‘If she’s to cook ’em when she comes in, we must mind the fire,’ he said, falling into a more familiar tone, and raking together the embers

with a careful and experienced hand. ‘Ye find me, young gentleman, in a small apartment that is kitchen and chamber and hall, as the song says. What does it matter to a lofty mind, s’longs ye find honour and a warm heart of gratitude there?’

‘But, indeed, I think I must go,’ said John, with the timidity of his age. ‘I feel all right now. It was only just for a moment. I feel quite steady, and I think I must go.’

‘Not before ye have tasted such hospitality as I have to give ye, me heroic boy. The saviour of me child must not go from me doors without a sign of me appreciation—without a bit of supper, at least. Maria! are ye come at last? And here is our honoured guest that says he must go. Come, child, and bid ye’r deliverer stay.’

‘Wait and take some supper,’ said the woman, with her pathetic look; ‘it will be a pleasure to us both. It’s not late, and you needn’t fear; you’ll get no harm.’

‘Harm!’ said her husband, ‘from you, me love, or from Montessoro? No, he will get no harm, whatever a brutal manager or designing critics may say. Thank God, Maria, corrupting the

young was never laid to your husband's charge, me dear. He shall see that conscious virtue is not ashamed of humble offices. I will prepare the table while she makes ready our food. There is nothing derogatory in that, me young friend. Look at Mrs. Montessor if you would see one that is superior to every fortune. She has had her cooks, her housemaids, her grooms; she has driven in her own carriages, and worn silks and satins. And now ye see her preparing to fry the sausages. And which is the finest office?—the last, sir!—for she's always a lady—a perfect lady—whatever her occupation may be.'

John did not feel called upon to make any answer to this. He sat in a half dream of wonderment, while all these domestic arrangements went on in this strange little interior, where all was so new and extraordinary to him. How had he got there? What sort of place was it? What kind of people were these? The curious serio-comic character of the episode did not strike him so much as it might have done an older spectator; but the hissing of the sausages on the fire, before which this unknown woman

stood, her wistful eyes fixed upon the frying-pan, while her husband, with his fine language and fine sentiments, laid the cloth upon the table behind, were too strange, too peculiar, too ridiculous, even—for he was hungry again, and there was a sort of warm friendliness in the air that comforted his young, childish soul—too comfortable, not to affect the boy. He felt a sort of pleasurable disquietude and alarm and embarrassment. He ought to go, he felt, but he was shy and they were kind, and he did not know how to get himself away. Presently the child who was the occasion of it all, and who had clung to her mother's skirts all the time, pulled a stool towards John's feet, and sitting down by him began to pat his leg with soft little touches.

‘Did it hurt much,’ she said, ‘that big horse’s foot? I called mamma and it was you.’ What made you get hurt for a poor little girl like me?’

‘What made him? It was God, Edie, to save you to mother: and God bless him for it,’ said the woman, turning round.

‘It was a heroic action,’ said Montessor, ‘it was the act of a hero, me chyild. Your saviour

will always be to us a noble youth. Me young benefactor, as yet we do not know your honoured name.'

John paused for a moment. He never could tell what curious impulse possessed him. Perhaps it was because he was in a new world of his own discovery, with which no one else had anything to do. He said, with the blood rushing to his face,

'My name is John May.'

When he heard his own voice, his heart gave a great leap and throb; but whether it was the feeling of one who takes a false name, or of one who for the first time claims a true one, he could not tell. The act, which was almost involuntary, filled him with an excitement which he could not explain.

'May!' cried Montessor—'Maria! what did I say? that there was something in the countenance of this noble youth not unfamiliar. I knew a May once—I have not forgotten him. Me young friend, ye are like that companion of me youth—yes, ye are like him. I felt it from the first. He was the kindest, the dearest—but misfortune fell upon him. Ah! may it be

that the blood of our friend runs in your veins.'

'Montressor,' said his wife, hurriedly, 'this young gentleman can have nothing to do with the May you once knew. It is not a thing to be talked about, that connection. You know what I mean. There is not the slightest likeness, nor the least possibility : for goodness sake keep your ideas to yourself, and think how impossible—The supper is ready,' she added, in a lighter tone. 'Come, Mr. May, a little food will do you good, though it is neither rich nor rare.'

CHAPTER III.

SUSIE.

JOHN did not leave his new friends till late, and when he did so he felt quite well, nay, more than well, in a state of elation and satisfaction with himself and all the world. The pain from his wound was quite gone. It had not been bad at any time. The shock only was what had affected him. Now he remembered it no more, except that his hat, when he put it on, pressed a little upon the place, which was only half hidden by his hair. Mrs. Montessor had assured him that it would not show, but John did not care whether it showed or not: he was, indeed, rather proud of it, very willing to tell how it came about, and the whole story of his adventure. He had supped with pleasure upon the sausages, and he had shared with Montessor a

steaming drink, hot and strong and sweet, which had made him cough, but which gradually had brought a glow of comfort over him. He had been a little afraid of it at first, and had not taken much, but he was quite unaccustomed to anything of the kind, and it mounted to his head at once, filling him with causeless elation, satisfaction, exhilaration.

He felt pleased with himself and everybody round him. Montessor he thought a capital fellow, and listened to him with admiration, and Mrs. Montessor was awfully kind, and the little girl (whose life he had saved—at first he had not allowed them to say this—but now he acknowledged the fact with pleasure) was a dear little girl. He had never enjoyed himself more. He was delighted with the adventure, and felt that this was indeed life. He might have spent a whole century in Edgeley without meeting anything of the kind. He got away at last with difficulty, promising to come back. That is, Montessor endeavoured to keep him longer, and John, to tell the truth, had been not at all indisposed to stay. It was the woman who had urged his departure. She had given a great

many hints, she had, indeed, given John a warning look when her husband got up to fetch the kettle to make more of that steaming, odorous drink. She had even whispered in his ear to go, saying that it was time for him to go to bed; and half offended, yet half approving, John had obeyed. None the less he thought her awfully kind, and Montessor a capital fellow.

He could not leave them his address, for the good reason that he did not know it, though he felt sure that he could find his way back; but he promised, with enthusiasm, to return, to keep up a friendship so auspiciously begun, to hear more of those wonderful stories about the theatre with which his new friend had delighted him. With what smiles and shaking of hands, and promises to come back he got himself away! stumbling a little in the darkness, as he came downstairs, getting out into the night with that sensation of lightness and swimming in his head, with that elation in his mind which was indescribable, which had come he could not tell how. The air from the river blew in his face again as he came out, and he paused a little

to consider, to retrace his steps in his own mind, and think out the best route. His conclusion was that he must get back to the Strand, and follow the road which had brought him here as well as he could, hoping to recognise the different places he had passed, and the bridge by which he had crossed the river. The Strand was as tumultuous as ever, but he paid much less attention to it. He had passed that first and ordinary stage. The streets! He felt that he knew now a little more about London life than was contained in the streets. He no longer allowed himself to be pushed hither and thither by the throng, but elbowed his way in the boldest manner, like a person, he hoped, to the manner born, with that delightful sensation of manhood and experience and satisfaction with himself. It was as if he had wings to his head, like a classical personage. It seemed to soar, and float, and carry him along. He could not help feeling that he had made a fine *début* in life, and jumped over a great many preliminaries. He was already 'in the swing,' he felt. To be sure, his new friends were poor: but that was a mere chance, and they might

be rich again to-morrow. Montessor was not only a capital fellow, he was, by his own showing, a man of genius; and what a thing to leap in a moment, on his first step in London, into the intimacy of such a man! Of course he was a Bohemian, but everybody knew that Bohemians were the most amusing class; that all artists belonged more or less to it; that it was sausages and porter one night with them, and the next truffles and champagne.

Notwithstanding the pleasurable sensations with which John set out on his walk, it was no small business to get home. Nothing could be more confusing than the streets, the corners which he seemed to recognise, and then felt that he had mistaken, the curious windings of the way, the impossibility of distinguishing one from another. He seemed to himself to have been walking for hours, much hustled and knocked about, but serenely indifferent in his happy state of mind, when he became aware of the great mass of the Houses of Parliament rising against the sky of night, which now was full of stars and soft clearness; and the bridge leading away from all the noise and crowding

into darkness and quiet. He scarcely paused this time to look at the carriages coming and going, but passed by with a pleasant consciousness that there were other centres of existence almost as important as that of Parliament. He knew nothing really about Parliament, beyond what everybody knew, beyond what was in the papers every morning: but his head was buzzing with anecdotes of the great people of the drama, the 'stars' whom Montessor knew, and among whom he had figured, and hoped to figure again. The names of these distinguished persons rustled confusedly through the boy's brain. He almost felt that he had been supping with them, hearing all their wit. What a fine thing to have come so near that brilliant sphere on his very first night in town! And Montessor had promised him tickets for the first night on which he should himself assume the leading place to which he had been accustomed.

'A box, me dear young gentleman, to which you can take the ladies of your family,' that high-minded individual had said; 'for ye will never see the name of Montessor in any play-

bill where the performance is not fit for a refined female's eyes.'

John found this phrase delicious as it came back to his mind—'a refined female.' It was like 'Pride and Prejudice,' he said to himself. But at that moment he came in sight of the great hospital looming up against the sky, and its shadow came upon him like—like what?—like the shadow of death, he would have said in a graver mood, like a wet blanket, he said in his levity. But even the levity sank when he perceived that the lights were very faint in the great building, and that along the row of little houses opposite, so far as he could see, there was but one point of light, and that a very feeble one. Then, for the first time, John began to think that this new and delightful experience of his might have a very different aspect from another point of view. All was very still in the little street. If he had to knock to rouse the landlady, the echo would carry, he thought, ever so far, would penetrate the big walls opposite and wake the sick people, and disturb one stern sleeper. How should he explain himself? The first night! that which made the

experience so delightful, made it also rather dreadful from the other side: for how could he make it clear to *her* that it was the first time he had ever essayed the adventures of the streets? His heart failed him as he drew near the house, and indeed he was not quite clear about the house, among so many others exactly the same.

His steps as he came along made a noise upon the pavement which frightened him. He thought confusedly of the steps stumbling along the street in the village when the public-house closed, and how the old people, if by chance they were up so late, would shake their heads. He seemed to hear the stumble, the little interval of dulled sound when those late passengers took the softer path along the garden wall; then the sudden access of noise, when they arrived, with a swerve and lurch, upon the bit of pavement. Good heavens! Might people inside these houses hear his steps and think the same? for it seemed to him that he, too, stumbled and swerved and scraped along the pavement. This, however, was but a momentary chill; he said to himself what did

it matter? he was all right; there was nothing to be said against him; and, with an attempt to call up the elation of mind which had nearly worn out, and a step which was jaunty in attempted carelessness, he went on. The jauntiness, however, was a little marred by the necessity of examining the houses to see which was his own. They were so horribly like each other! John did not know how to make sure which was the right one in the imperfect shining of the few lamps, and under the shadow of the hospital. He went past the lighted window, and then returned again. Some one, he thought, was looking out at the edge of the blind; but then no one could be looking out for him.

A door opened softly while he was trying to find something by which he could recognise the house, and then a voice, more soft still, whispered,

‘John—John Sandford? Is it John?’

He turned back with a thrill of mingled alarm and relief, and at the same time a quick start of contradiction.

‘I’m John—John May,’ he replied, with

a sudden confused impulse. 'Is this the house?'

'Oh, come in. Oh, come in! You don't know me? I'm Susie. Oh, John, John, where have you been? I have been waiting for you for hours. Oh, John!' She had pulled him into the little parlour where one candle was burning, and looked at him strangely, with a look of terror and distress. She threw her arms round his neck, then drew back without kissing him, and cried again, in a tone of reproach, 'Oh, John, John!'

'What is it?' he said. 'Are you Susie? What is it? I went out for a walk. I did not know anyone was coming to-night.'

She stood looking at him fixedly. He had taken off his hat, and the plastered cut, which Mrs. Montessor said would not show, showed, alas! painfully upon his forehead, though half covered by the ruffled hair, which by half concealing made it appear greater than it was. He caught sight of himself at the same time in the little glass over the mantelpiece. He was very pale, his hair very much ruffled by the wind, his shirt a little disordered in the dress-

ing of his wound, his coat imperfectly brushed by the Montressors, showing still some signs of a fall—and in his eyes a sort of wildness which he himself saw, but did not understand.

‘What is the matter with you, Susie—if it is Susie. Why do you look at me so? What have I done? I lost my way, and I am dreadfully tired,’ he added, sitting down, suddenly falling into despondency as great and causeless as his elation had been before.

‘Where have you been? You have been in a—row, or something. Oh, John, John! I came rushing, so glad, so glad to see my brother. Oh, I’ve looked for you so long! and to find you like this, like this, at last!’ and she covered her eyes with her hands.

‘Like what?’ he said, feeling his lips stammer in spite of himself, his voice thick. ‘I don’t know what you mean.’

She uncovered her eyes and gave him a look—such a look—of love and pity, and horror and dismay.

‘Oh, John,’ she said, ‘oh, John!’ as if all reproach and all tenderness, and everything that the heart could say of blame and forgive-

ness and heavenly pity, were in that utterance of his name.

He knew nothing of that which put meaning and misery into her cry. No one had ever warned him, no one had enlightened him, the facts were all unknown, yet something of the feeling in her suddenly stricken and aching consciousness came into his.

‘I don’t know what you mean,’ he said again. ‘You think I’ve been doing something wrong. It isn’t true. It’s very, very strange, to have to defend myself the first time I see you—the very first night——’

‘Yes,’ she said, with an echo in her voice, which made the words seem like the very climax of despair, ‘the first night!’

‘She has put you against me,’ said John.

‘She!—you mean—— Oh,’ cried Susie, turning upon him in sudden indignation, ‘you may think you are taking his part, calling yourself by that name, putting yourself against us; but he never, never did that. He knew all along, and always acknowledged—always acknowledged——’

It was John's turn now to question. He asked :

‘Who do you mean by *he*?’ in a hurried, choked voice.

Then Susie came suddenly to herself.

‘We have enough to think of without going back to old, unhappy things,’ she said. ‘Oh! John, I’ve had such hopes of you. I’ve thought you were to make up for everything. We’ve never gone near you to disturb you in your life. Mother said it was better so—to leave you with the old people, where all was so good and quiet, and harm was not known—that was what she said. Oh, how often we’ve talked of you, John; and when she told me you would not have her for your mother, she said there was nothing else to be expected, and that it did not matter so long as you escaped the curse, so long as you were kept good—so long—— And now!’

‘The curse?’ said John, awed, confused, overcome. Things began to come to his mind dimly, vaguely, turning to perhaps another point of view.

‘And now I suppose this is the very first time

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you have ever been free,' said Susie, in a tone of despair, wringing her hands. 'The first night in London—where you came with your heart full of grief, and no evil thoughts—Oh, none! mother said so. But the very first time you go out, the first time you have the chance, the first night—oh, it is cruel, cruel! the first night—— Oh, John, John, John!'

'What have I done?'

There was no elation about him now. His serenity of soul was gone, and all the floating visions of pleasure, and assurance that this was life. He half understood what she must mean, because he felt what a difference had taken place in him, and how ridiculous his thoughts of half-an-hour ago began to appear.

'You come in late,' she said, 'very late. You have a cut in your forehead; you have mud on your coat and your knees. You've fallen somewhere, and been hurt. You come in quite jaunty and gay, and then, before I have said anything almost, you sink down and don't know what to say.'

'Almost!' he said, with a scornful intonation—almost nothing meant everything that could

be said or hinted, it seemed to John. He had never known before what domestic altercation or fault-finding was. It was the strangest novelty in his life. The old people, perhaps, would have been anxious too. They would have asked him all about it—they would not have liked him being so late. But how different their indulgent waiting for his explanation, from this sudden indictment, so full of implications which he did not understand. The Houses of Parliament, and the bustle of the Strand, and Montessor with his stories, might be new, but this was newer, still more strange to him. And yet she was so unhappy that John could not resent it. He had gradually come back to himself, to the boy who had never been misjudged, of whom nobody had ever suggested harm. His good sense returned with his recollection. After all, he had done nothing to be ashamed of. He thought of the steaming hot drink which had made him wince and cough, and then had made him feel so much at his ease, so full of self-appreciation. If that was wrong, then it was all that was wrong.

He collected his faculties while he sat thus

silent, looking at his sister, the sister of whom he had always thought so tenderly, but to whom now it seemed he had brought such cruel disappointment. How was it? The accusation seemed to him so false and unreasonable that he could not understand how it could be maintained. And he was not angry; this gave him an immense advantage, he thought—not angry, but only astonished more than words could say.

And then he told her the whole story from the beginning to the end, with a tone of apology which surprised himself, but which did not convince her, he saw. And yet there was nothing to apologise for. It was a good thing, not a bad, he had done. He had saved the child: if perhaps Montessor had made too much of it, still it was not a bad action to throw one's self into the middle of the street to pick out a little unknown child from under the horses' hoofs. He had no reason to be ashamed of it. He felt his breast swell a little with involuntary self-approval as he went on. No, there was nothing to be ashamed of. The cut on his forehead began to hurt him a little as he talked of it. He had not taken time to think of it before.

But now, when he did think of it, it hurt, and he felt a little pride in the consciousness. And then there were the Montressors. Well, he did not know anything about them, to be sure, but they had been very grateful to him, and he had felt shaken, not very able to walk, confused in his head.

‘You should have taken a hansom and come home,’ said Susie. ‘You might have known we should be anxious. If you had done that, all would have been well.’

And she shook her head at the story of the Montressors, listening in silence to all he said. John heard his voice grow more and more apologetic, though he did not mean it. They were kind people, they had been very good to him; why should he apologise for them? But yet his voice took this tone. When he had done, there was a silence, a silence which was full of disapproval. Susie sat with her head on her hand. She said nothing, she did not even look at him. The pain of his first alarm was over, but her mind was not satisfied. After a while she rose, and, going up to him, put an arm round him.

‘Promise me,’ she said, ‘dear John! Oh,

Johnnie, Johnnie, my little brother that I have always longed for! Promise me it shall not happen again.'

'What shall not happen again?' He shook himself free of her, with an irritation which was as new to him as all the rest. 'What do you mean? Promise never to pick up a child under the horses' feet; never to make acquaintance with anyone that is kind; never to—— What do you mean?'

'Oh, dear, dear boy, what shall I say? Don't you know what I mean? John, it's *that* we're frightened for, mother and I; it brings everything that's bad with it. It is destruction. Oh, it is nothing to-night, I know; it may be quite innocent to-night: but it's never innocent, for it's the bringing of all harm. John, it was *that* which brought all our trouble upon us: and you should be more careful than anyone, for you've got it in your veins.'

'What?' he cried, almost with violence, in the exasperation of his soul.

But she made no reply. She gave him a look that was full of meaning, if he could have read it, and, stooping over him, kissed him on the

forehead. Then, with a sigh, left that painful subject, whatever it might be, and proceeded to occupy herself with the little details of his rooms and his comfort.

‘You have never unpacked your things,’ she said. ‘Give me your keys, and I will do what I can, though it is too late to do much to-night. If you had stayed in, and unpacked your things, then we should have had such a pleasant evening together. I came over as soon as I could get away, and, oh! how disappointed I was to find you gone. But never mind. You did not think of that—how should you? Perhaps you had forgotten Susie altogether, you were so little when you went away.’

‘Why was I sent away? It would have been better, far better never to have parted,’ said John; and then he added, ‘I never forgot you, Susie. I think you haven’t changed much. I remember you all this time. You stood at the door and cried when I went away.’

‘And many, many a time after,’ she said, looking up, with tears in her eyes. ‘Oh, many a time; I missed you so. Oh, Johnnie, perhaps you are right. We should have known all the

things to guard against, while grandfather and grandmother——’

‘No,’ said John. ‘I am wrong; it would not have been better. They were happier to have me. I am glad they had a child till their death to love them, not one like Emily, but me——’

He stood up, looking not like the boy she thought him, but like a young, indignant angel, with his head raised and his nostrils quivering. Susan took the woman’s part. She began to wonder at and admire him, and to feel herself in the wrong, as indeed she was.

CHAPTER IV.

ON HIS TRIAL.

‘You were late last night, Susie.’

‘Yes, mother, very late. I was with John.’

‘I know you were with John. And I have no doubt you had a great deal to say to him. So far as I know him, he would not have much to say to you.’

‘Indeed, it was the other way,’ said Susie.

‘It was he who talked. He said he remembered me perfectly well, and that I was not at all changed.’

Mrs. Sandford raised her eyes to her daughter, interrupting her work for a moment. She had a great deal of work. To be matron of a great hospital is no easy thing, and there were arrears besides to make up. She had been at work half the night, and had not heard at what hour

Susie had stolen in. Now she looked up with an expression which made her stern face for a moment gentle.

‘It is true,’ she said ; ‘you have not changed. I think better of him for perceiving that.’

‘You must think well of him, mother. He is a good, kind boy. He had an accident last night saving a child. It was nearly killed under a carriage, and he rushed in and saved it. But he did not escape scot-free. He has got a cut on his head, but it is not much. I looked at it: you need not be anxious.’

This Susie repeated very quickly, like a lesson, hurrying the sentences upon each other, lest her mother should interrupt her before all was said.

‘An accident—a cut on the face—but not anything much. Susie, what are you telling me—already? He went out, then, last night?’

‘Yes, he went out. Why shouldn’t he? He’s so young, and his first night in London. It isn’t at all exciting to us; but think what it would be to a boy who had never been here before.’

‘You are accusing him before I attack him, Susie. The first night! I didn’t even think

of warning him not to go out. I thought him all safe the first night. Oh me, oh me, has it begun already?—what I've trembled for all his life!

'No, no,' cried Susie with her anxious voice. 'I'm sure it's not that. He went out, to be sure. Fancy, at his age, to be in London, and without anyone to talk to, and not to go out. The parents of the child were very good to him, and had his head plastered up. It was very well done too,' said Susie, with professional approbation. 'For my part, I was quite happy to hear that he had saved the child.'

Mrs. Sandford shook her head. She turned back to her books again; then pushed them aside, and put up her hands to her head.

'Oh! Susie,' she cried, 'I knew how it would be. He is your father all over. All his ways are *his* ways. I thought he was safe down in the quiet country with the old people. If they had lived, I should never have wished him to know anything of you or me. What can we do for him? We can't even have him in the house with us. Oh, how foolish I was to bring him to London! I might have paid some one down

there to take care of him—to keep him out of evil.’

‘Mother, you know that could not be. Don’t you remember how many talks we used to have about it? You can’t keep a boy of his age so. He is almost a man; and, mother, he looks like a man sometimes: when he rose up in indignation against me, because I—because I——’

‘You thought so too? Don’t conceal it from me, Susie. You saw him come in—with all this story about an accident—the very first night. I knew it was in him, his father’s son: and my poor father and mother with all their innocent tales about him; how good he was; never a suspicion, not a weakness of any kind. Oh, why did they die? Why did I bring him away from the country? And why, why is it permitted that this poison should come into a young boy’s veins, from a father he scarcely knew!’

‘Oh, mother, wait till you see; don’t condemn him unheard.’

‘Condemn him! Would I condemn him? My heart bleeds for him, Susie; but I see all the tortures that are in store for us: and for him it would have been better if he never had

been born. For what can we do for him, you and I ?

‘ Oh, mother, it is not so bad as that ; it may never be so bad ! ’ Susie said, with tears.

Mrs. Sandford shook her head. She drew to her the books with which she had been busy, and resumed her work. After all, whatever happened, that had to be done. There was nothing in the world except work, in which there was any satisfaction. This was the conclusion she had come to long ago. It was morning, a little before the time when John was to have his audience, and this was how it was prepared. The table was covered with books, reports, accounts, all the records of her occupation, which had fallen into arrears during that forced leave she had been obliged to apply for, to bury her father. The room was very lofty for its size, somewhat barely furnished, with enormous windows and the fullest blaze of daylight, not a line or a corner of shadow anywhere. It was fitted with great cupboards full of stores—and constant use, constant business, was visible in every arrangement. There was nothing for grace or ornament, and not much for comfort—

a place not so much to live in as to work in ; but this was suitable to a life which was all work. When she resumed her examination of the books, Susie withdrew to a corner, where there was a little table and needlework, her own little place in this chamber and temple of labour. It was not pretty work with which she was occupied. She was making flannel bandages or belts, hemming down the rough edges, rolling them neatly up, ready for use. Susie had grown up in this atmosphere, and knew no other. She had gone through all a nurse's training, though she had not taken up that profession. When a more tender hand than ordinary was wanted where all were tender, she was called to help. She was always at hand when the strength of the nursing sister was overtaxed. But still she had her own little separate place as the matron's daughter, a sort of lay element where all were professional. She wore a sort of modified version of their severe black and white dress. Susie's dress was black too, with white collar and cuffs, but these had sometimes a line of ornament, and she wore a ribbon at her throat, a locket, a bracelet, a few slight marks that she was not under

the rule. She was twenty-two, very modest and quiet, sometimes looking older than her age, yet sometimes also looking infantine in the fulness of a life that knew no distractions, nothing but the hospital, the service of others. She was not strictly pretty. Her hair was brown, her eyes brown like most people's, her complexion generally pale, with a little colour coming and going, nothing in her to be remarked at the first glance, no beauty—but to those who knew her a certain charm, tranquil and pure, the beauty of a spirit absolutely free from any pre-occupations of its own. There are very few people in the world of whom so much can be said, and perhaps their perfection in this moral way means a deficiency in some others, a want of imagination, even a defective vitality : but the human race is not likely to err so, and the occasional examples to be met with in the world are always wonderful, to those who can believe in them. Susie, as was natural, was very imperfectly known by those about her. She was, everybody allowed, very good, but how far her goodness went beyond the surface, or whether it was not partially seeming, or if

there might not be a certain sense of self-interest in being so good (for to be sure, in the atmosphere in which she had been brought up, goodness is the best policy), was a point sometimes discussed in the hospital, where, as in other places, it was a little difficult to realise that heavenly form of character. People thought, even when they had no doubt of her, that so much goodness was uninteresting, and that they would have liked her better with a few more faults, which probably was quite true.

But Susie's tranquil spirit was in much commotion this morning. She had slept little all night, and thought much. Susie was well aware of the tragedy of the family life. There were no secrets in it from her. And she had been brought up in the belief that the cloud of hereditary evil was so strong upon her brother, that to keep him in ignorance—to keep him if possible at a distance, where he could never know anything of the antecedents of his family—was the best thing for him. It did not occur to her that she herself was her father's daughter, as much as John was his son, and that, if the hereditary principle was true, she ought to

have shared her brother's danger. This view of the subject was dismissed by the fact that she was a girl, and therefore her mother's child, an opinion very fallacious, and not to be maintained for a moment, either by logic, reason, or experience. But, in spite of all these qualifying things, a foregone conclusion will always hold its place. She, it was felt, was in no danger, though she knew everything; but John, the boy! For him it was expedient that all precautions should be taken, with him there was a kind of miserable certainty that safeguards would fail.

This was the persuasion in which she had been brought up. And it is impossible to tell what horror and misery the girl had gone through, waiting for her young brother's return on his first night in London. She had been waiting a long time, and she had gone over in her own mind all the dismal expectations which an anxious woman, bitterly acquainted with one form of dissipation, can turn over in the dreadful suspense of a long evening spent in watching for the return of one who comes not, and whose absence can be accounted for only

by some catastrophe. A world of old recollections had come rolling up before her distracted eyes. She had seen him reeling along the street, stumbling in, with wild eyes and a stammering voice, with all the miserable signs upon him of that vice which, in its beginnings at least, is no sin, means no harm, and yet is the most degrading and destructive of all vices. No words can tell the tortures which a woman goes through, to whom such vigils are habitual. They were perhaps even more terrible now by being purely imaginary. For fact, however frightful, brings into action all the subtle forces of mercy, the attempts to account for and excuse, the natural yearnings of the heart over the sinner : whereas in imagination there is no alleviation, and the first fall carries with it a tragic prophecy of utter destruction. When John had appeared, with his paleness, with the lingering traces of that exhilaration which Montessor's drink had left still in his eyes, and with the cut showing under his disordered hair, Susie had felt for a moment as if all were over, and the tragic conclusion, so long foreseen, coming to pass before her eyes.

But, presently, that subduing presence of reality began to tell upon her, and though it was hard to shake off the sway of the anticipated, and hard to realise that the story of the supposed sinner was not a gloss of excuse, yet by-and-by her mind had changed. She had not been quite convinced up to the moment of quitting him; for Montessor's drink had left a fatal odour, and there was a certain excitement in the boy's manner and address: but as she lay on her bed, in the dark, and went over and over everything that had passed, Susie's attitude changed. I will not assert that the foreseen and expected were so far vanquished in her, that she had a calm and steady belief in her brother. Not that; but a passionate partisanship sprang up in her mind. Another conclusion rose up and did battle with the first. It had seemed miserably certain that he would err before. It seemed impossible but that he must overcome now. She went over every fact of the previous night, and explained it away to herself as she lay gazing at the dawning light. She made up by degrees a picture in every way favourable—an ideal figure, an image full of

generosity, tenderness, and help. She seemed to see him flinging himself, a heroic young deliverer, among the crowding carriages; probably they had poured a little brandy down his throat to bring him to himself (for Susie had not advanced far enough in the new way to understand how in all innocence, though quite voluntarily and cheerfully, John might have swallowed Montessor's potion), and then, what so natural as that, a stranger, he had lost his way? He did not know that she or anyone was waiting for him, or that he should find a friendly voice, anyone with whom he could exchange a word when he got back. Why should he have hastened back? There was no reason for it. And to think that on his first evening in London he had saved a life! If the excitement of it brought a little tremor upon him, who could wonder? Had she seen it only, what with alarm and pride, and happiness and delight, Susie felt that she would have trembled for hours. He would not have been human if he had not felt it. And the brandy must have been given to bring him to himself. He was not aware, how should he be, of the degrading

suspicious in her mind, and so did not explain that. But no doubt that was how it was. She rose up in the morning, having slept very little, still thrilling with the anxiety, the relief, and the pain—John's partisan and advocate. She would have been so more or less, in any circumstances. She was so with her whole heart now.

John came in shortly after, a little later than the appointed hour. He came with a sense that he was on his defence, or at least was on the defensive, an almost more oppressive sensation: for except that he was distrusted, and all his doings regarded with an unfavourable eye, he did not know any more, neither what form the doubts and suspicions took, nor what reason there was in them. He came reluctantly, with nothing of the feeling with which a youth of his age, conscious of no wrong, should go to his mother; no trust in her kindness, no confidence that she would see anything which concerned him in a good light. And the very place, the great institution, which chilled and disheartened him with its atmosphere of professional business, added to this intuitive reluctance. It was the home of Christian charity and kindness; it was

the place in which devoted men and women gave up their lives to the solace of the suffering, to save lives and alleviate pain. Many a poor creature had found ease and succour and the tenderest help in it. But yet to John it was cold, sending a chill to his very heart; the great space, the stony stairs and passages, the universal pre-occupation were all so destructive to the idea of anything that could be called a home. People might live there no doubt, did live there when they were compelled by illness, or by duty for the help of those who were ill, but to *dwell* under that vast roof which covered so much suffering, how was that possible? And She had no other home, and this was the only place in the world to which he had any natural right to come.

Home in a hospital! to him who had known what a natural home was, a place you live in with your own, possessing it to yourself, a secure shelter and refuge, what a chilly public place it was! He followed the porter of the hospital, who guided him up the bare stairs and pointed out the way to the matron's rooms at the end of the long, lofty bare corridor, with a heart full of reluctance and

disagreeable anticipations. He felt sure of being disapproved of, though he did not know what he had done that was wrong, and great discouragement and despondency, and a sense of injustice and an impulse of resistance filled his mind. It was not like a son going to his mother's room, or a youth without a home to the centre of domestic warmth and protection, but like a clerk, or official messenger on business, that he knocked at the door pointed out to him. He was told to 'Come in' just as the messenger on business might have been told, and went in, and lingered for a moment by the door, struck by the strange impressiveness of the place; the great stream of unshadowed daylight, the height of the walls, too high for decoration, the furniture no more than necessity required, the large writing-table in the middle of the room, laden with books and papers. Mrs. Sandford, after her conversation with Susie, which had agitated her in spite of herself, had returned again to her work with more than ordinary absorption in it, and put up her hand to warn the new-comer against interrupting her in the midst of a calculation. John's heart burned within him at this

strange welcome. He stood for a moment undecided. It occurred to him, with a flash of resolution, that he would turn and go, cutting this bond, which was one of mere conventional connection, and, rushing forth, make his way as he could alone in the world.

He was stopped in this sudden gleam of half-formed intention by a soft touch upon his arm, and a still softer touch on his cheek, and found Susie standing by him, whom he had not seen on coming in, looking at him with a tender interest and pride.

‘I did not see you right, last night,’ she said, ‘Johnnie dear. There was no light. Let me look at you now.’

‘There is not very much to see, Susie.’

‘Oh, there is a great deal to see: my little brother that I have never stopped thinking of all my life—and just like what I thought; but you are not my little brother now. Mother, here is John.’

Mrs. Sandford laid down her pen and held out her hand.

‘If I had lost the thread of that account, I should never have found it again,’ she said. ‘My

work is in such arrear. How are you this morning, John? Let us see this place on your forehead.'

'It is nothing,' he said, with a flush of colour.

'I must see that for myself,' she said, rising up, and taking his head in her hands. Other feelings came into John's heart as he felt those hands, with their skilful touch, putting aside his hair, examining his wound. She let him go in a few moments, with a slight pat which was almost a caress. It was what she would have done to any young patient, but this he did not know. 'It is, as Susie said, nothing to be uneasy about. If it does not heal in a day or two, we must get Mr. Denton or Mr. Colville to look at it. But I think it will heal of itself. It would have been more prudent, John, to remain at home instead of seeking adventures in the streets the first night.'

'It didn't look much like home,' he said.

'No; but it would, if you had waited for Susie. She is very like home even here. We cannot make a home for you, unhappily. The only thing for it, failing that, is to find you something to do.'

'That is what I desire most,' he said. She

had seated herself again, returning to her books, and was looking at him with the air of one who has but a short time to spare for any other interest. Her eyes glanced from him to the long lines of figures she had before her. 'Couldn't I do some of that for you?' said John, with a sudden impulse.

Mrs. Sandford started, and looked at him with astonished eyes.

'My work?' she said, 'do you think you could do my work?'

'If it is only adding up figures, surely,' said John.

This time she let her eyes dwell on him a little longer, with a momentary smile, but more of wonder at his audacity than pleasure.

'That was well meant,' she said; 'it was well meant. Susie, I think you can be spared to-day. You might go out with him, and show him something. It is natural that he should want to see something: and I shall have more time this evening to tell him what I have settled. I have heard of an engineer's in which you can begin work. But you must take a holiday to-day. Susie will get her hat, and be

ready at once. You will like that I suppose?"

'Yes,' he said.

Susie withdrew quickly, her face brightening, and John stood, watching his mother, who let her eye wander over her figures, then recovered herself with a glance towards him, in which he could read impatience restrained, and a desire that he should be gone. It was this, perhaps, that inspired him with the question, which a moment before he had never dreamed of putting to her.

'Will you tell me,' he said, 'whether there was ever a Mr. Montessor who was a friend of my father's?' He asked this without knowing why.

She started, and the pen fell out of her hand. If it were possible to change from her natural paleness, he would have said she grew more pale. Against the merciless shining of the great window he could see her tremble, or at least so he thought. She did not say anything for a moment, and when she spoke her voice was somehow different.

'I did not,' she said, 'know all your father's friends; but it is a long time since all ended in

that way. What do you know of any such friends?’

‘It is an uncommon name,’ said John.

‘Yes, it is an uncommon name. It is the sort of name that actors assume, and people of that kind. Ah, here is Susie, ready. Take your brother wherever you think he will like best to go. Don’t hurry. I shall not be anxious, as long as you are here in time for tea.’ She had risen with a sort of uneasy smile, and went with them to the door, touching Susie’s dress with her hand, smoothing down the little jacket she wore. When Susie had preceded her brother out of the room, Mrs. Sandford transferred her touch, nervously, quickly, to John’s arm. ‘Such people are no friends for you,’ she said, hastily. ‘Avoid them wherever you meet them. Avoid them! they are not friends for you.’

She had made no acknowledgment, and yet she had made more than an acknowledgment. The self-betrayal was instantaneous, but it was complete. Then it *was* his father of whom Montessor would not speak. Poor May! What had happened that he should be called Poor May!

CHAPTER V.

BROTHER AND SISTER.

SUSIE knew her way about, and where to go and what to see. She was not disturbed by the noise and clangour of what she called 'The Underground,' a mode of conveyance which at first bewildered the country boy, to whom the clash of train after train, the noise, the complication, the crowds pouring this way and that took away all understanding, and who felt himself a child in the hands of his sister, who knew exactly when the right train which she wanted was coming, and all about it, and steered him in her deft London way through the tumult.

'How can you tell which is which?' John cried, feeling the dust in his throat, the din in his ears, and his eyes growing red and hot with

the flutter of the crowd, and of all the sights that flashed past him, and the smoke and suffocating atmosphere.

‘Oh, I can’t tell. I only know,’ said Susie.

She was at her ease in the midst of the commotion, looking as calm and as modest and composed as if she were walking in country lanes, not afraid of the thronged stations of the Metropolitan, the dingy platforms, the confusion of porters shouting, and doors clanging. John had meant to take care of his sister, but it was he who clung to her in the midst of the bewilderment and the noise. She knew which train to take, she knew when to change into another, where to stop ; though to him they bore no distinction, neither the stations, the names of which he could never discover, nor the directions—for as yet, John was not even aware which was north or south, east or west.

Under Susie’s guidance, however, he saw and learnt a great deal in that first wonderful day. She took him from the Tower, to St. Paul’s, and then to the Abbey, to the Houses of Parliament—to the parks—as she was used to do with strangers, with convalescent patients sometimes,

but that more gently—and with their relations and friends who would come up from the country to see somebody in the hospital, and then contemplate longingly the unknown world around them, till Susie, always kind, took pity on their ignorance. By this means she had been trained in the duties of cicerone, and was extremely efficient, knowing just enough and not too much: which is best—for a guide too erudite is a confusion to the simple mind.

She took her brother, in the middle of the day, to a modest place on the outskirts of the city, which she knew by this kind of excursion, to give him something to eat, and there pointed out to him what he found as interesting as anything—the young men and middle-aged men of all classes in pursuit of luncheon, crowding every kind of hotel and eating-house. It gave John altogether a new view of that busy life, where there is no time to go home for meals, but where everyone has comfortable means of being fed with no makeshifts or picnic arrangements, but a whole population toiling to supply the brief necessary repast. This, with all its immense supply and demand, and the sight of the men about the

streets, plunging into, and being swallowed up in the high buildings which have replaced, in so many cases magnificently, the old shabby offices and chambers in which London laboured and grew rich, was as exciting to John, or perhaps more so, if the truth must be told, than the historical places to which Susie guided him. He was overawed by St. Paul's, where he stood under the great dome, and heard the waves, so to speak, of the great sea of London dashing outside with a rhythmic force: and the venerable Abbey with all its records went to his heart. But for a youth of his day, standing eagerly upon the verge of life and longing to take part himself in all that was going on, the flood and pressure of men steadily pushing their way along the streets, all with some object or pursuit, pressing in crowds to snatch their hasty meal, pouring back again into every kind of office, in every possible capacity, that was to him the most interesting of all. Should he himself be like that in a day or two? Full of business, full of work, his mind all engaged with something outside of himself, no time to inquire into his own history, or discuss his relationships,

or make himself wretched, perhaps, about things that might turn out of so little importance. This was the thought that took entire possession of his mind, as he went on.

‘Do you think you’ll like it, John?’

‘I don’t know if I’ll like it. That’s not what one wants to know—one wants to know how one is to get on.’

‘I should think,’ said Susie, hesitating a little, ‘I should think—that you are sure to get on, if you try.’

‘It shan’t be for the want of trying,’ said John.

‘Oh,’ cried Susie, ‘that is the thing we’ll think of most—that you should try, John. If you try your very best, and don’t succeed, it’s not your fault. That is what mother will think of, and I, too.’

‘But I mean to succeed,’ said John. Many have said it before him, and yet failed miserably. Yet each new aspirant means to win, and is as certain of his power to do so as those that went before. John’s purpose shone in his eyes, and his certainty communicated itself to his sister. She put her hand through his arm, giving him an affectionate pressure.

‘And oh, how I wish and pray you may! and believe it, too. Oh, John, with all my heart! That will do more for mother to heal her wounds than anything else in the world.’

Do more for mother! That was not what he was thinking of. He drew his arm away, perhaps somewhat coldly. The mother, who was Emily, had but few claims upon him. If Susie had said it for herself, if Elly had said it, that would have been a motive. He did not feel inspired by the one presented to him now. And there was a pause between them, and Susie saw that she had made a mistake, and that this was not the spell. They went on for some time after very soberly, without any question on John’s part or offer of information on the part of Susie, in a sort of heavy, dispirited way. At last she pressed his arm again, and said,

‘Oh, John, I wish you would have more feeling about mother. If you only knew what a life she has had, what a hard life! I can’t do much, one way or another. I can only stand by her, and do what I can to please her; but you, you are different. You can do so much. Oh, John!’

‘It is of no use. She does not believe that I will ever be good for anything; sometimes I think she—dislikes me, Susie.’

‘Oh, John, how can you say so, her own son, her only son! She has always thought of you, always; that I know.’

‘How has she thought of me? That I am sure to go wrong? I know,’ said John, with a sudden inspiration, ‘that is what she expects, that I must go wrong. She is always waiting to see me do it. I don’t know why, but I am sure it has always been in her mind.’

‘She didn’t know you, John,’ said Susie, eagerly, not seeing that she assented to his suggestion, ‘how could she know you? We had never seen you since you were a child; and if she thought——’

‘Why has she never seen me since I was a child?’ the boy asked, sternly. ‘Why is it I didn’t know you, Susie, my only sister, till now?’

‘Oh, as for that,’ said she, pressing his arm, ‘that didn’t matter, did it? You and I would always understand each other. It is only to say that you are John and I am Susie. We didn’t want any more.’

‘If sister and brother do that, shouldn’t mother and son do it?’ said John; ‘and we don’t, you see. She expects everything that is bad of me, and I think everything that is——’

‘No,’ she cried, ‘don’t say that; oh, John, don’t say that. It is all that you don’t know her. Wait a little, only wait a little. She has had a great deal to bear. She has had to put on what is almost a mask, to hide her heart which has been so wounded; oh, so wounded! John, you don’t know!’

‘Not by me,’ he said. ‘I have never done anything to her. But she has made up her mind that I shall turn out badly. Don’t contradict me, Susie, for I know.’

Susie made no attempt to contradict him. She patted his arm softly, and said, ‘Poor mother, poor mother,’ under her breath. John was not ill-pleased that she should take his mother’s part—it seemed suitable that she should do so, the thing that was becoming and natural. He did not want her to come over to his side. And then the mother was so wrong—so ridiculously, fantastically wrong, that some one to support and stand up for her was doubly

necessary. Poor mother! who would not even have it in her power to be glad, as the commonest mother would be, when her son turned out the reverse of all she had feared.

‘If you would only forget,’ said Susie, ‘this notion you have taken into your mind, and go on (as I know you will go on) well, and make your way, mother will be beside herself with joy. Oh, it will make up for everything that is past, all she has had to bear; and there is nobody can do that but you.’

This appeal left John cold. He was thoroughly determined to go on well—by nature in the first place, for he felt no inclination for anything else. And if Susie had implored him for her own sake, or for Elly’s sake, he would have responded magnanimously, and promised everything she pleased—but for his mother, for the woman whose real name (if she only knew it) was Emily, how could that affect him? He made no reply, and presently their attention was diverted by some new thing which was strange to the country lad, and they discoursed on this subject no more. They had reached the Strand, the scene of John’s adventure of the

previous night, when Susie suddenly dropped his arm very hastily, and with scarcely a word of explanation, bidding him wait for her, took refuge suddenly in a shop. He had not recovered from his surprise, when he was accosted by some one who came up with great cordiality, holding out his hand, and in whom John, with no small surprise, recognised his acquaintance, the father of the child he had rescued, the man who had been so grateful and enthusiastic in his thanks, Montessor, who hailed him with a heartiness that was almost noisy, shaking hands violently and protesting his delight.

‘Is it really you in the flesh, me dear young friend? And I’ve found ye, then, in daylight, and quite natural. You’re not the good fairy in the pantomime, nor yet the Red Cross Knight as me Nelly says ye are. And none the worse? I’m proud to see ye, young Mr. May.’

‘Oh,’ said John, ‘it’s nothing; indeed it’s nothing. I hope she is all right, and that she has taken no harm.’

‘She’s taken no harum, sir; but she’s a young creature of a highly nervous organisation, and her mother and me, we are always anxious.

You'll come in and see me chyld, Mr. May, and let her mother thank her deliverer. We talk of nothing else, if ye'll believe me. Ye are a sort of a little god, me young hero, to the little one, and her grateful parents, and ye'll not pass me humble door.'

'I can't come in to-day,' said John, blushing a little, yet not without a sense that all this applause was pleasant, 'for I'm waiting for my sister who has gone into one of these shops. I am glad I did not go after her, or I should not have seen you; but I will come another time to see you and the little girl.'

'Do,' said Montessor. He was a person who could not be called unobtrusive: his hat had a cock upon his head, and his elbow against his side, which called the attention of the passers-by. His shaven face with its deep lines, and mobile features, and even his way of standing about, occupying much more than his proper share of the pavement, aroused the attention. John felt unpleasantly that the people who passed stared, and that one or two lingered a little, contemplating the old actor, with that frank curiosity which the British

public permits itself to display. John, being young and shy, did not like these demonstrations; but they pleased the object of them, who stood aside a little, and said to his young companion, 'They remember Montessor. Though the managers consider me *passé*, sir, me old admirers, those that have once flocked to see me in my favourite parts, have not forgotten me. The public makes up for the injustice of the officials; me kind friends—me good friends! This would be sweet to the heart of me faithful partner, Mr. May.'

'Yes, perhaps she would like it,' said John, hesitating. But for himself, he could not disguise that he shrank from the appreciation of the passengers in the Strand. Montessor was too much occupied by the pleasure it gave himself, however, to observe this.

'The public, Mr. May,' he said, 'is the best of masters to the artist. As soon as ye can get face to face with it, sir, the battle's done. It's the officials, the managers, the middle-men, those that live upon the artist's blood:—but a generous public never forgets an old servant.' He looked round upon the people who stared

and lingered, as if with the intention of addressing his thanks to them, while poor John shrank into himself.

‘I think I must bid you good-bye, sir,’ said the boy. ‘My sister is waiting for me. I’ll come and see you soon, and ask for—for the little girl.’

‘Must ye go?—then I’ll not detain ye. You’re right not to keep a lady waiting. Yes, come, me young hero—with us you’ll ever find a grateful welcome. And I’ll tell Nelly ye have promised. Good-bye, and a father’s blessing, Mr. May.’

To John’s surprise Susie came out to him from the shop, whence she had seen everything and heard something, looking very agitated and pale.

‘You don’t mean to say, John,’ she said, suddenly carrying him away in the opposite direction, ‘that *that* man knows you by the name of May?’

‘I never said anything about it,’ said John, in his surprise, ‘but it is true, whoever told you. That is the name he knows me by—and why not, since it is my name.’

‘Oh, John!’ cried Susie, with tears in her

eyes; 'when I told you it was for family reasons, for property and that sort of thing! Why will you be so perverse? Do you think it is a nice thing, do you think it looks honest and true, to have two names?'

'Perhaps not,' said the lad, 'but then, let me have my own that was mine when I was a little child. Your family reasons, Susie, they were never told to me.'

'Then for mere pride you will make an end of all mother has done and tried to do all her life, because she couldn't explain to you, a little boy that couldn't understand; you'll expose her to all sorts of trouble, and yourself—yourself to——'

The tears were in Susie's eyes. Her countenance, so gentle and mild, was suffused with angry colour, with indignation and impatience.

'Even that man,' she said, 'even that man, a stranger, could—— Oh, John, will you go against grandfather as well as the rest of us? He left you the most of what he had, and his own good name, John Sandford, because he had no son. Will you go against grandfather and grandmother too?'

‘No,’ said John, after a pause, ‘I never did, and I never will. I suppose they wished it, though they never said anything. But, Susie, I’m no longer a child. All those circumstances you speak of, that you have known for years and years, surely may be told to me too?’

Sheshuddered a little and turned her face away.

‘I’ll speak to mother,’ she said, in a subdued voice. Then, more boldly, ‘But if you’re to be John Sandford, as grandfather said, you can’t be—the other. Is it right to have two names? It is just the one thing that cannot be done. It looks as if one were dishonest, untrue, to hide one’s name——’

‘I have no reason to do that,’ said John. ‘If you are sure grandfather intended it to be so? He never said anything to me. I always took it for granted without inquiring. I had forgotten the other. As for Mr. Montessor,’ said John, ‘I did it without thought. I had been thinking over it a great deal on the way to London, and when I saw him it was the first thing that came into my head.’

‘And how do you know Montessor?’ Susie asked.

‘Why, Susie, that is the man of last night!’

‘The man of last night! the man whose child—— And you gave him that other name? Oh!’ She gave a little fluttering cry, then paused, with a look of consternation growing upon her face. She stopped short for a moment in the streets in the extremity of her perplexed and troubled sensations. Then she caught John’s arm again with a close pressure. ‘Don’t see that man any more. Oh, promise me not to see that man any more.’

‘Why?’ said John. ‘He is not perhaps so well-known as he thinks, but he is a good fellow enough, and knows a lot. He is very kind. You should see him with his little girl; and then he was so kind to me.’

‘Oh, John, oh, John!’ Susie cried. It had all been so pleasant when they had set out, when nothing but the ordinary incidents of living had to be taken into account. But now they had struck upon more difficult ground.

CHAPTER VI.

BEGINNING LIFE.

THAT day John's future career was determined summarily, without any further consultation of his wishes.

It was the career he had himself chosen, the very same career about which there had been so many consultations at home in the old times. This was how he described to himself a period so very little withdrawn from the present moment. At home—he had no home now, nor even a shadow of one. It was the profession he had chosen; Elly's trade; the one they had fixed upon in their youthful fervour as the best for the advantage of the race, as well as for the worthy work and fit advancement of the young workman, who, in his way, was still to be a Christian knight. To make lighthouses and

harbours for the safety of travellers at sea, and roads and bridges for the advantage of those at home—that was how the boy and girl had regarded it, or rather the girl and boy; for John had taken the matter from the beginning more soberly than Elly, taking satisfaction in the idea of learning surveying and all the other necessary preliminaries, even mathematics, at which he had always been so much the best. But when he was called to another interview in his mother's room at the hospital, and with her pen in her hand, suspended in the midst of the reports she was writing, or the accounts she was making up, Mrs. Sandford had given him the letter which he was to take to a certain address, and so begin work at once, John's heart rose within him in resistance and indignation.

‘I have settled everything,’ his mother said. ‘You will have nothing to do but to send up your name and this note. Well, it is what I understood you had set your heart upon; isn't it so? You want to be an engineer. So my father said.’

‘Yes, I want to be an engineer,’ John replied.

‘And they were sending you to a foundry in Liverpool—which is quite a different thing—when I interfered. You were not grateful to me, though your grandmother also, I believe, had been very, very much against it. You wanted to go there because I did not want you to go. Wasn’t that the reason? You must put away those childish ideas, John. Understand, once for all, that it is your real good I am seeking, and that it can be of no advantage in any way to retain this position of antagonism to me.’

‘I wish no antagonism,’ said the boy. ‘I think everything is settled very quickly, very—summarily. I think I might know a little. I am nearly eighteen. I might be allowed something to say.’

‘Be silent, Susie,’ said Mrs. Sandford, ‘there is no reason why you should interfere. You have been allowed a great deal to say. I have followed your own lead altogether. I might have put you into a merchant’s office, which would have been more in my way—but I have adopted yours without a word. You could scarcely point out to me the right people to apply to, I suppose? It is only so far as this

goes that I have acted for myself. But I don't see that this conversation can do us any good, John. Mr. Barrett is a great supporter of the hospital, he is a very good man, and he is one of the first in his profession. He will take you, rather for my sake, it is true, than your own, but that can't be helped at your age; and, as he takes you without any premium, that is so much to your advantage. He will settle how you are to begin and all about it when you go to him, which I hope will be at once—to-day.'

John went away with his letter without saying any more, and he carried out his mother's orders, but without any pleasure in the beginning, though as a matter of fact it was his own choice. That she meant his good, that she was doing the best she could for him, he believed, though grudgingly; but why should she do it so hardly, without grace or kindness, without anything that could make it pleasant? How often may such a question be asked; how impossible to answer it. To mean everything that is best in the world, to take trouble to do it, to heap solid benefits on the head of a dependant, a child, or retainer; and yet to do it all so as to make the

kindness an offence, almost an insult. What a curious perversion is this of everything that is best and tenderest! John's mother was substantially right as well as substantially kind. She had chosen the best guidance for her son. She had in no way thwarted his inclinations. She had indeed followed their natural bent, taken trouble to find the means of satisfying them; and yet! John went away without a word. He obeyed her and his fate. But he thus attained his own wish as if it had been a hardship, and submitted as to a fiat pronounced in entire indifference to his wishes. What he would have liked to do as he crossed the bridge, and felt the playful gust of the April wind in his face, would have been to drop the letter into the river, and go away in one of those outward-bound ships, on one of those clanging railways which made a black network all about, to the end of the world. That would have pleased him indeed! To throw the letter into the dark, quick-flowing tide, to disappear and be no more heard of: and finally, years after, to re-appear prosperous and great, John May, and bring wealth and reputation with him. His

mind dallied with this dream as he went along, and especially as he crossed the bridge, which suggested freedom and movement. There is no thought that is so apt to come to a very young mind. To go away mysteriously, suddenly, leaving no trace, and in the future—that future which is scarcely further off to seventeen than to-morrow to a child—to come back triumphant to the confusion of all prophets of evil. Sometimes the young dreamer will carry out his vision, bringing misery and self-reproach to those he leaves behind, but coming back in most cases far from triumphant, forced by destitution or misery, perhaps, or at best disenchanted and dreary, dazzling no one with the success which has ceased to be sweet. Perhaps John, who had a great deal of sense, divined this—at all events, he was held by those bonds of duty which had lain on him lightly in the past, yet had created a tradition and necessity of obedience, which nothing he had yet encountered was strong enough to abrogate. He felt the temptation, but it never occurred to him as one to which he could yield—and though his heart was in revolt and his pride all in arms,

yet he trudged along soberly across the river to Great George Street, where he was bound, without any active resistance, feeling himself under the guidance and control of an unkindly fate.

He was received not unkindly, however, though with great gravity, by Mr. Barrett, the gentleman to whom his mother's letter was addressed, and who questioned him as to his studies, how far he had gone in his mathematics, and whether he had made any acquaintance with the special work of the profession he desired to take up. Mr. Barrett was a very serious person, indeed, in a dress that was almost clerical, and with manners more solemn than ever clergyman had, which is a curious effect not unusual among lay persons who assume the attitude of advice and exhortation, which is supposed to be the special privilege of the clergy. Mr. Barrett's necktie was not white, but the grey and black with which it was striped were faint, producing a sort of illusion in point of colour; and his manners were more distinctive even than his tie.

‘I know your mother,’ he said, ‘she is an

excellent woman, a most worthy person. Her son ought to be satisfactory, and I hope you will prove so; but she has had many trials, much more than fall to the ordinary lot.'

John did not make any reply; at all events nothing was audible of what he said, though in reality he kept up a fierce fire of response. 'If she has had many trials she ought to have kept them from strangers,' was what he said hotly within himself.

'I trust you begin work with the hope and intention of making up to her a little for all she has had to bear,' Mr. Barrett resumed. 'She has been for many years under my personal observation, and anyone more devoted to duty I never saw.'

'Oh, yes,' said John to himself, 'that is like Emily! not because she likes to do it, but because it's duty,' which was at once a hostile and foolish remark.

'But you must remember,' said his adviser, 'that London is a place full of temptation and danger. Everywhere it is easy to go wrong; so much easier unfortunately than to do right; but in London the devil is roaring at every

street corner, seeking whom he may devour. You must make up your mind to struggle stoutly against his wiles. I can't even shut out of my office, though I try to be as careful as possible, those who prefer the broad path to the narrow ; but I hope you will not let yourself be led away.'

'I hope I shall do my duty, sir,' said John, this time audibly enough, in a not very sweet or genial voice.

'I hope you will—that is the right way to look at it : especially to a young man in your position, a great deal of care is necessary. Among my other pupils you will find some who have less occasion, as people say, to work. I don't myself allow that. I think every man ought to work, and work with all his strength, if not for necessity, yet for—duty, as you say. But the sons of parents, who are well-off in this world's goods, often take a great deal of licence, which you, Sandford, in your position, must not take as an example. You must keep your nose at the grindstone. It is doubly important for you in your circumstances.'

It was all that John could do not to demand

audibly, as he did in his own consciousness: 'What are my circumstances, then, what is my special position?' His position had been a very good one all his life till now, the best in the village, after the rector's family, their comrade and associate. He never had any occasion to think of himself as received on sufferance, as inferior to anyone. It wounded his pride bitterly to be compelled to look upon himself in this way.

'Your advancement will depend upon yourself,' Mr. Barrett continued. 'It is for you to prove what you can do. After you have gone through your course of instruction, if you show yourself diligent, careful, and, above all, trustworthy, you will receive our best recommendation. But all this must depend entirely upon yourself. We can't, of course, take you upon our shoulders and guarantee your future. This I hope your mother fully understands. I am willing to stretch a point for a woman who has acquitted herself so well under trying circumstances. But she must understand, and you must understand, that we don't make ourselves responsible for you; you must in the end

stand or fall on your own merits. The firm cannot carry you on their shoulders about the world——’

‘I hope no one expected anything of the kind,’ cried John, aching and throbbing with wounded pride.

‘No, no, I hope not. I think it is always better to make these things quite plain at first. The premium I remit with pleasure to such a worthy woman as Mrs. Sandford, to show my sense of her admirable conduct under very trying——’

‘I beg your pardon,’ cried John. ‘I don’t wish, for my part, to come in on better terms than the others. I don’t want any charity. I have not my own money at this moment, but I shall have it when I come of age, and I assure you there will be no difficulty about paying the premium then.’

Mr. Barrett looked at him with astonished eyes. To have charity cast back in his teeth is agreeable to no man. He stammered as he replied, with mingled indignation and astonishment,

‘I—I don’t understand you. What—what do you mean? Are you coming to me to

propose an arrangement on your own account? or to complete one made by your mother?' He regained his composure as he went on. 'If this is temper, my young friend, we had better break off at once. I don't want any touchy people taking offence about my place.'

His tone had changed. He had given up exhortation and good advice, and spoke sharply, with a ring of reality in his voice which brought John to himself.

'I beg your pardon, sir. I am, perhaps, wrong. I don't think I am ill-tempered or touchy. I do want to do my duty, and learn my work, and make my way. It was only the idea of charity: and I had never been used to it!' John said.

'I am afraid you'll have a great deal to struggle with in your disposition, if that's how you take things,' said Mr. Barrett, shaking his head. He added, quickly, 'I don't know that I've time to go into the question of your feelings. The manager will tell you about hours and all arrangements. I hope he will have a good account to give of your work and progress. Good-day.'

This was all he made by his outburst of impatience and indignation. He left a disagreeable impression on the mind of his new employer, and went out himself sore, humiliated, and injured, feeling himself in the wrong. It was not his fault, he said to himself. It was the different position in which he found himself, so different from the past. That he should be of no account, received, if not out of charity, at least out of a humiliating kindness, because of his mother's admirable conduct in her trying circumstances—in what trying circumstances? John could not believe that his father's death had been so tremendous a grief as all these sayings seemed to imply. And then to be no longer consulted, no longer even told what was going to happen to him, sent off with a note like an errand-boy getting a place!

The pride or the humiliation of the boy who has always felt himself to be somebody, and suddenly discovers himself to be nobody, is not of much consequence to the world. It is not of much importance even to himself. In most cases it does him a great deal of good, and he lives to feel this, and smile at the keen pangs of his boy-

hood. And yet there are few pangs more keen. They cut like knives through the sensitive fibres of poor John's heart, and the only refuge which his pride could take was in imagining circumstances in which he should vindicate himself—tremendous accidents, in which his courage and presence of mind should avert catastrophe, misfortunes in which he should be the deliverer—the most common of imaginations, the most usual of all the dreams of self-compensation. It was with his head full of all these new complications that he returned—not home, which was the word that came to his lips in spite of himself. Not home, he had now no home. Nobody could call Mrs. Sandford's rooms at the hospital, home, not even Susie.

John's heart swelled as he caught himself on the eve of using that antiquated word, that word which had no significance any more: and then he thought of Elly under the old pear-tree with her algebra, thinking of him. She had told him to think of her so. A little picture rose before him quite suddenly. Elly under the pear-tree with her algebra! A smile flickered to his lips at the thought. She would be sure to think of

him, for she was not very fond of algebra, and, to escape a little from those mystic signs and symbols, Elly would be glad to take refuge in recollections of her friend who was almost like a brother. He thought he could see her under the old pear-tree, with the wind in her hair, lifting the long, heavy, beautiful locks. The pear-blossoms would not be over yet, the sun would make it shine like an old castle with turrets of white. Mr. Cattley would still look over Elly's algebra and shake his head. Oh, yes, he would shake his head more than ever; for John would not be there to suggest a way out of those thorny paths, and Elly would not make much of them without that help. It gave him a sensation of pleasure, as if he had escaped for a moment from all the gravities of fate, into that cheerful garden, and found a glimpse of something like home in Elly's bright face.

'You must find fresh lodgings, nearer to your work,' said Mrs. Sandford, when she received his report, which was given, it is unnecessary to say, with considerable reticence, and disclosed nothing about the little encounter with Mr. Barrett on the subject of the premium, any more

than it did of that imaginary glimpse of Elly in the rectory garden. 'I am very glad it is all settled so comfortably; but you must find lodgings nearer your work.'

'I shall not mind the walk. After the day's work I should like it.'

'No. I should not like it for you. I don't want you to get the habit of roaming about London. It is not good either for soul or body. A lodging near the office is best.'

'You surely don't mean to shut me up in the evenings,' said the boy. 'You don't mean me to stay indoors all the night?'

'It would be much better for you if you did—for yourself. You could find plenty to occupy you. You might carry on your studies, or, if you wanted amusement, you might read. Twenty years hence you will be pleased to think that was how you spent your nights.'

'I can see no reason,' he said, 'why I could not do all that, and yet live where I am.'

'That is because you love the streets,' said his mother. 'I know: oh, I did not require that you should tell me. You like the movement and the noise and the amusement.'

‘It is quite true,’ said John, ‘and is there any harm?’

‘Oh,’ she said, ‘did not I tell you, Susie—he is his father’s son.’

CHAPTER VII.

A MAN GROWN.

AFTER this there ensues a gap in John's life :—no real gap, indeed, but a steady, quiet continuance of work and training of which the record might be interesting enough to those who are pursuing the same path, but not perhaps to anyone else. He was transferred to lodgings nearer his work, almost without any will of his own, his mother acting for him with a steady authority against which he chafed, but which it was impossible to resist. The lodgings might have been the same as those from which he was transferred, a little parlour, a little bed-room, a red and blue cover on the table, a horse-hair sofa, the same features were in both. And here John settled down. He knew nobody to lead him into the ordinary haunts of young men in London; and perhaps the fixed prepossession

against him that he was sure to like what was wrong, had as strong an influence as the fixed certainty that nothing but right and honest things could come from him, which does so much for some favourites of nature. Human nature is very contradictory, and no two specimens can be guided in the same way. His mother's stern observation of every possible indication of weakness, and Susie's wistful watch, enlisted perhaps the evil as well as the good of John's nature in the cause of virtue. His temper, and that perversity which is more or less in every natural character, rose in arms against the imputation that was upon him. He said to himself that, whatever happened, their prognostics should not be permitted to be right: and thus aided, so to speak, by his demons as well as by his angels, with his head held high against all the solicitations of the lower nature which would have proved that injurious foregone conclusion to be a just one, he made his way through the loneliness of those early years—going back evening after evening to spend the dull hours in his little sitting-room, with a determination which virtue alone might

not have been equal to, without the aid of those forces of pride, and opposition, and resistance to injustice.

This austere self-restraint told upon his work, as it always does. Temperance and purity give wings to the mind, as they give force to the body. He read in self-defence, to quench all youthful longings after gaiety and brightness, and when he had exhausted poetry and fiction, which naturally he felt to be the best indemnifications and solaces for his loneliness, he began to read for work and for ambition, and soon found in those books that dealt either directly or indirectly with his profession, an interest more ardent, more exciting, than even that of story. From seventeen to twenty-one, a youth, with this inclination for work and few distractions, can get through an enormous amount of reading: and John's mind gradually filled with stores such as no student need have been ashamed of. They were not perhaps so classical as they might have been had he gone to the University, but, in all probability, even in that respect they were fully as extensive as they would have been had John

without the stimulus of his resolution and his solitude 'gone up' with Dick and Percy Spencer into the midst of the noisy young life of their college. He would not have resisted these cheerful influences; he would have done what the others did, and read as little as was necessary. But in the unlovely quiet of his little parlour in a little London street, with pride and angry self-defence keeping his door, along with more celestial guardians, he read with enthusiasm, with passion: and as his books, after the first juvenile frenzy for the lovelier and lighter portions of literature, were practical and serious, engaged with the present rather than the past, he became by degrees a mine of information, thoroughly equipped for all the chances of his work, and every region that these might lead him to. He read travels and books upon new and little known countries with devotion. He studied every scheme for the new development of the untrodden portions of the earth. He had the stories of all great industrial undertakings at his fingers' end. In short, John got to know so very much more than the narrator of his story, that I give up

the attempt to follow him, simply adding that though it had been done rather with the intention of making that austere life possible, than from any other reason, it had the most admirable effects both on his mind and his work. Such stores are like the miraculous gifts of the Gospel, they cannot be hid. It soon became apparent, both to those who were over him and to his fellow-pupils, that for the settling of a disputed question, or for the geography of any new piece of work undertaken by the firm, or for those most essential questions about native workmen and local government which tell so much on enterprises like theirs, there was no such referee as John. He was sent for before Messrs. Barrett would settle about that railway in Hungary. He was consulted as to the South American business, which eventually, young Sandford's knowledge having been overborne by the apparent advantage of the undertaking, was a source of so much trouble to the firm. And, by the time he was twenty-one, John was recognised by everybody as the most valuable of all the young men trained in the office. He had already been sent 'abroad,' a word which

means anything from Calais to Africa, several times. He had been in America. He was altogether an accomplished and fully-trained engineer, capable to tackle even the lighthouses of Elly's fancy, but perhaps not so earnest about lighthouses as, under Elly's inspiration, he had been in his seventeenth year.

All this time his correspondence with Elly had never dropped: but it had become intermittent. They had not met during these years which tell for so much in a young man's life, and probably even tell for more in the experience of a girl. How she had grown up, or whether she had grown up at all, was a question which John did not discuss with himself. He was very fond of Elly, no one had ever taken her place in his mind. He still thought of her under the pear-tree with her algebra, as if during all this time there had been no further development either of herself or her studies. Elly probably formed a clearer apprehension of the changes that had occurred in him: but to John she was still in short frocks, with all that beautiful hair about her shoulders. He thought sometimes of the serious kiss which had passed

between them in token of everlasting friendship, of brotherhood and sisterhood, a seal of youthful affection untinged by any of the agitations or uneasy appropriations of love. It had brought a little colour to Elly's cheek, but none to that of John, who had asked for it so seriously. The thought brought a little stir now, a little pleasurable movement of his blood. A sister, but not like Susie ; a friend, but holding a place apart which no other friend could come near. And, to tell the truth, John had not very many friends ; his early life had been against it, and those guardian demons of whom we have spoken—demons without discrimination, who kept out good as well as evil. He was friendly with most of the people about him, but he had not many intimates. The place in which Elly lived supreme, and that in which even Dick and Percy were still recognised as 'the other boys,' was kept sacred to that early circle which had been the closest and the warmest John had ever known—all the more so from its contrast with what followed, from the severe mother amid all the cares and business of the hospital, and Susie with her wistful, watchful eyes.

He had not paid very much attention to the fact that his birthday was his twenty-first, and that he was attaining his majority, though that is so important a point in the career of many young men. It was not particularly important to John. He had no joyful tenantry to celebrate it; no happy father and mother to wish him joy. He was already in some things much older than his age, experienced by long encounter with the practical, and by the habits of self-dependence which the nature of his occupations had forced upon him. He was rather, if anything, disposed to smile at the importance of twenty-one, not seeing what difference it could make. His little property he had long ceased to think of. At seventeen it had seemed important; at twenty, nothing. What could it matter? It was better, even more just, he thought, that his mother should have it, who was after all the natural heir of her parents: and if it could purchase a little ease, a little relaxation for her, John was not only generously willing, but had a less amiable, half scornful feeling, that to throw it back at her feet was the only thing that he could desire to do. He

was astonished accordingly when he went by her invitation on the evening of his birthday to visit his mother, to find her table covered with papers and she herself awaiting his arrival with a number of accounts and note-books.

‘I have to render an account of my stewardship,’ she said, with her usual gravity. He did not always recognise the change in her manner of speaking to him and regarding him, but nevertheless there was a great change.

‘What stewardship?’ he said.

‘I cease to-day to be your guardian, John, and your trustee and manager and everything. My father thought it unnecessary to burden you with any of those things. He had perhaps an excessive confidence in me. I have now to give up my accounts——’

‘I want no accounts,’ he said: ‘I want to hear nothing about it. If I am to be acknowledged a man, that’s enough. I’ve been to my own consciousness a man—and older than most people—long enough.’

‘Yes,’ she said, with a little sigh, ‘you are a man; you have proved yourself one. The softest of mothers (and I know I have never been

soft) could not acknowledge that with more gratitude and satisfaction than I.'

'But a little grudge,' he said, with a laugh. He was able to laugh now, though never to forget altogether the bitterness of being misjudged. He no longer talked to her with constraint, feeling himself like a child in her presence—but even yet he was never really at his ease with her. 'With a grudge,' he said. 'You would almost rather I had confirmed your bad opinion, and justified you in what you expected.'

'I can't hope that you will understand me—in that respect,' she said, with a little wave of her hand dismissing the subject. If she did not repent of her evil expectations, she was at least a little ashamed of them, and desired no recurrence to the subject. 'Look here,' she said, 'this is an account of all my incomings and outgoings for the last four years.'

'I don't want to see them,' said John. 'I am sure you have always done what was best for me.'

'And, for the future, here is the statement of what you have at your disposal. Surely, at least, you will look at that.'

'Mother,' said John, 'if it is anything worth

counting, couldn't you take it, and get a little rest? All this upon your shoulders from year to year, never any ease or repose, must wear you out. Why don't you give up, and take Susie to see a little of the world—of course I don't know if there's enough for that,' he added, hastily, with momentary confusion.

'Mother, didn't I tell you!' said Susie, a flush of pleasure rising over her face.

'It was not necessary for anyone to tell me. There never was any want of generosity,' said Mrs. Sandford, in a sort of aside. And then she added, 'Thank you, John. It is very good of you to make the offer: but I'm used to the hospital, and I'm not used to rest. I don't think I should like it. And my father and mother would like you to have the full enjoyment of your own. There is not very much, but it will always be a comfortable addition to what you can make. There is about two hundred a year, everything put together. And I have as much—that is to say, Susie will have as much as soon as she makes up her mind to do anything independent—in the way of marriage or—any other way.'

At this, Susie turned away with another flush of agitation and embarrassment. Susie was now twenty-six, a mature young woman. And perhaps by times there had come across her mind desires such as maturity brings, to adopt some independent career for herself. It was apparent even to John's eyes, which were not by any means acute in respect to the doings of others, that there had been moments recently in which the idea of marriage had been in consideration between the mother and daughter, but he had never been told anything about it, nor who the suitor was. And there had also been floating ideas in Susie's head of joining a sisterhood, and thus consecrating herself to the service of the sick, to whom she was now a volunteer and unofficial ministrant. But nothing had come of that any more than the other. She was in a state of mental commotion, awaiting that development which nature craves, and uneasy, feeling herself no longer a girl to be swayed by the natural law of obedience and submission, but old enough to decide and act for herself: save only that she could not decide how to act. Her mother's words seemed to her a

reproach. She turned away ; then, coming back again with an effort, laid one hand upon John's arm and one upon Mrs. Sandford.

‘Mother,’ she said. ‘We’re both honest, both John and me. He can do for himself, and I, so far as I can see, will never be able to make up my mind to do anything for myself. Why won’t you take us at our word, and take grandfather’s money, and, for the first time in your life, rest?’

The three were all very different. John, perhaps, in his confidence of young manhood, and that consciousness of being entirely a satisfactory person, which cannot fail to have a certain influence on a young man’s way of looking both at himself and others, was now the one most like his mother—and yet he was not like her. While Susie, with her soft eyes, her soft manner, her little flutter of indecision, was as unlike as possible in sentiment, though her features were almost identical with those of the self-controlled and serious woman, with so many responsibilities on her head, and so distinct a grasp of them all, whom she was imploring to take up that softer task, to retire, and accept

the generosity of her children and repose from her labours. Mrs. Sandford looked the tallest of the three, not indeed in fact, though she was taller for a woman than John was for a man—but certainly in nature, in sentiment, in the impression which her still graceful, slight figure, her head carried high, her general air of authority, gave. She looked from one to another with a smile, in which there was (to Susie) indulgent toleration of miscomprehension, to John, a little indifference to what he might think at all.

‘Circumstances alter everything,’ she said; ‘if I were really an old woman wanting rest I might take it from you. But I am not. I am as able for my work as either of you. I like it, and if you gave me your money you might have to wait a long time before it came back to you. All these things are against Susie’s proposal. And as for John——’

He looked at her with the opposition in his eyes which had never been quenched since the moment they had met at the little station at Edgeley, on the day his grandmother died.

‘What of John?’ he said.

‘Only that nobody at your age can say what

chances a few days may bring forth ; what occasion there may be for the support of the little fortune he has a right to, however little it may be. Let us leave this subject for something that will interest you more. John, your grandfather's house has not been sold, though I had thought it better to do so, had the opportunity occurred. But, as it happens, the opportunity has never occurred. It is yours, now, to do what you like with it, and the tenant who has been in it is going away. I have thought that perhaps you would like to go—and see for yourself what is best to be done. You have still friends there : and you have had few holidays—few amusements.'

There was a certain compunction in her voice—but John could not observe what there was in her voice, for the sudden haze of recollection, and all the old images and thoughts that came back and enveloped him in an atmosphere so different from this. The old house so little and peaceful, the old couple by the fire, the garden full of sunshine with the old gardener pottering about, and the old lady with her tender smile, gathering the flowers. It was not that

he remembered all these long past and half-forgotten things. They returned to him as if the sphere of living had rolled round, and he had come to the former times once more. How strange out of the matron's room in this huge London hospital, out of the engineer's busy surroundings, the office, the plans, the succession of big undertakings and journeys all over the world, to return back in a moment to that tranquil living once again! He was roused from this momentary realisation of the past, by Susie's soft voice saying, with a wistful tone in it, 'I should like to go with you, John.'

CHAPTER VIII.

A NIGHT ADVENTURE.

JOHN walked home to his lodging full of many thoughts. It cannot be unpleasant to anyone to find himself in possession of something unexpected, which can be called even a little fortune. Two hundred a year is not much, but it is a steady backing for a young man, bent, as John was, on making his way as well in money and worldly affairs as in matters of higher meaning. He appreciated the advantage, being full of good sense and practical faculty, and felt his foot the lighter on the pavement, and his spirit the more buoyant for it. Everything bore a very different aspect to him from the day when in his desolate boyhood he had discovered with a pang that he had no right even to what might eventually belong to him, nothing to do with it all, no power to keep the old house in monu-

mental rest and quiet, in memory of its departed inhabitants; which had been his first thought. He was aware now that nothing could have been more foolish than such an idea, and that the despite and despair which filled his bosom at that time were boyish, childish, unworthy. He felt ashamed, now that he was a man in full independence, having surmounted all these miseries, of the petulance, the bitterness, the misery of the boy. He had thought then that his grievances were beyond enduring, that happiness was over for him, that the shadow of the injustice and unkindness with which he had been treated would never pass away from his life. He could not but smile at that fond impression as he walked home with light elastic step, everything so clear round him, his head full of fine undertakings, his heart at ease. A faint sense of shame as of having perhaps been unjust to his mother, only subdued his self-satisfaction. When he recollected the days in which it had been difficult to think of her save as Emily, a flush of self-annoyance, of self-condemnation went over him; and yet it had been natural that he should have that feeling. Now he had, like

everybody else, a high respect for his mother. She filled her position with a dignity which elevated it. She was universally respected. He could not but feel that she was a woman worthy of all honour: and he had the satisfaction of knowing that she, who had begun with so much distrust and suspicion, had been forced to respect him. They had mutually achieved each other's respect, and there was a certain friendliness between them. This was the furthest extent however to which John's domestic affections had gone. He was fond, very fond of Susie: she was always sweet, always nice, pleasant to talk to, pleasant to look at, ever kind. But who could imagine the matron's sitting-room to be home? It had never been home, or taken any homelike aspect to the boy; to the man it was the lodging of his nearest relations, just as his rooms, wherever they might be, were his own lodging—nothing more. Home did not exist in his world, save in imagination and memory. He was free of all such ties as he walked on this particular night, which was a night in May, from the one place of residence to the other. His own rooms were better than those with the

horse-hair and red and blue covers of his boyhood. They had not even any associations in their favour, from that growing time. They had not been the scene of those evening studies which had made him what he was. They were more comfortable, in a better situation, but absolutely unconnected with anything save the most material side of life.

His life itself was much the same as his lodging. It was full of pleasant activity, and exercise, and employment. He had nothing to disturb him. He had been for some time earning quite enough for his needs, though he was still so young. But he did not feel young, having been upon the world, so to speak, so long, and having lived so much alone. His mind was full of engineering, of calculations, of expedients for carrying his road or his railway over a certain difficult pass, for getting the span of his bridge exact, for taking advantage of the geological formations of the country in which some special piece of work was going on, utilising the clay to make bricks, the wood for sleepers, to save time and the money of the firm. With these thoughts were mingled swift

glances at many a problem, passing gleams of insight and understanding, but little that was more interesting; his heart had been quenched in his youth, and all that belonged to it pushed out of place. The process had been a hard one, and he had suffered much while it was going on: but it had been accomplished more than anyone would have thought possible who had known of John Sandford's youthful life between the two old people who loved him in their old home. He was a man now, and as nearly living by the mind alone, and for the pursuits of the intelligence and reason without any softer intermixture, as any man of his age could be.

Yet, as he went along over the bridge with the fresh air blowing in his face, full of plans and purposes mostly theoretical or material, and with that buoyant consciousness of well-being and well-doing, of merit and the reward of merit in his whole being, little breaks of sentiment came in. Edgeley, which he had not seen so long, the dear, little old house which most likely would seem so shrunken and small, the rectory where he had been so familiar, and

Elly—Elly who had kissed him so sedately when he bade her good-bye. A little quiver of silent laughter went over him now at the thought of that simple token of half-childish affection. It was strange to think how Elly would receive him when he went back—not with a kiss, that was certain. Would it be with the same friendship as of old? There had been changes at Edgeley, yet not anything to make a break in the perfection of the picture. Mr. Cattley had lately (and against his will, John felt sure) been promoted to a living; and Percy was coming as curate in his stead. Percy, the curate! that made him laugh within himself once more. He wondered if Percy would be as of old when he was one of the other boys—or if he would think John Sandford, the young engineer, not good enough for the close relations of schoolboy times. John smiled at this, with the smile of conscious worth, not likely to be moved one way or another by what Percy might think. But it would be curious to go back in so different a guise and position to that old familiar scene. He was glad to think of taking Susie for a holiday anywhere, but perhaps

if truth were to be told he would rather have taken her anywhere else than there. With home she had no associations. She would interfere, even though she was too gentle, too unassuming, to interfere consciously, with a scene she had nothing to do with, and into which her image had never come. And he dismissed that mild image somewhat summarily from his thoughts. After all, she would be no more than a bystander. The interest of this revival of old associations lay entirely with himself.

He had to pass the office on the way to his rooms. It was in Great George Street, and all was very quiet, not very well lighted by the lamps, silent and vacant, with scarcely a light anywhere in the windows. There was a lamp, however, near Messrs. Barrett's door, and he saw, for some time before he came up, a figure seated on the steps. What was anyone doing there? With a keen sense of proprietorship in the place, and a determination to have no loiterers about, John went up to the door. As it happened it was not one figure but two, dimly made visible by the lamp, one sitting half-erect

propped up against the door, the other bending over him, calling him, shaking him occasionally.

‘Come along, can’t ye: take my arm, you’ll soon get your legs again. Get up, don’t ye ’ear me? This ain’t a place to stay.’

‘Let me alone,’ moaned the other, feebly, ‘I can go no further.’

‘Come along,’ cried the first. ‘Hi, mate! Don’t you go off to sleep, it’s dreadful bad for you. Take hold of my arm and come along. They won’t let you stay quiet here.’

John came up in time to hear some murmurings of this talk. He went forward briskly, with distinct determination to secure public order and quiet.

‘What’s the matter?’ he said, in a voice which, though it was peremptory, was too fresh and cheerful to be terrible. ‘What are you doing here?’

‘It’s my mate as is uneasy on his legs,’ explained a man, whose face was not visible, and who did not seem to have much greater command of his legs than his mate; and he added, hastily, ‘It ain’t drink. A man that likes his glass as well as ’ere another is my mate, but it’s

strangeness like. He's '—here he turned round, put his hand before his mouth, and whispered hoarsely, with alcoholic breath—'he's out o'—, out o' quod after fourteen year. Lord bless us, it's you !'

John, too, started a little as the blear face became visible to him in the wavering light of the lamp, which a brisk air was blowing about. He had nearly made the same exclamation. He stepped back a pace, and said, curtly,

'Yes, it's me : you had better move on, you and your mate, before the policeman comes.'

'Give us a bob,' said the man, 'for the sake o' old times. Lor', to think I should ha' seen you so long ago, and al'ays when I was engaged in what ye may call a good work. Give us a bob, sir, for luck, and because what I'm doing is charity. He hasn't got his legs, poor beggar. He's dazed like, and a little drop o' drink's done for him. He couldn't get no further. Thinks he's got home and a-going to turn in and make himself comfortable ; that's what he thinks.'

And there was a harsh laugh. Of all places to be taken for home, where a man might make himself comfortable, the steps leading up to that

securely-closed door, to the empty and dark house in which there was nothing but business, no human habitation, not even the possible succour of a poor housekeeper—was about the most terrible and extraordinary. John looked at the almost unconscious figure of the man leaning up against the door, gaining a certain support from the recess it formed and the corner of the woodwork, with a pity in which there was a sort of derision, too. Could any wretchedness and friendlessness be greater than that which sought refuge in the doorway of an empty, black, and echoing office? The poorest cottage would have represented something more human.

‘Look here,’ said John, ‘you know as well as I do that he can’t stop here. Can’t you get him away? Don’t you live somewhere where you can take him—if—if he’s a friend of yours?’

‘No, I don’t live nowhere,’ said the man. ‘The likes of me don’t live more one place nor another. We likes change we do: but give me a bob and I’ll soon get him a lodging. I don’t say it’ll be so easy getting him there, for

he ain't used to the streets, and he's dazed like, and a little drop of drink, a matter of nothing, a thimbleful's done for him. Young chap,' added the man, sinking his voice, 'that man was born a gentleman, talks like you do when he's hisself, and knows a lot. But when a man once goes over the traces that don't do nothing for him, not a bit. Young 'un, you mind what I say.'

There was a tipsy gravity about this admonition which, blended with the pity and the horror, took away all inclination to laugh, although the situation was miserably ludicrous too.

'This is the third time I've seen you,' said John. 'Last time you were working at a foundry.'

'For a little bit,' said the man, 'but I'm not one to settle nowhere, that's the truth. You see I never had no start to speak of, not like him there. I've al'ays been about the streets. It don't make much difference in the end, if once you take to them sort of ways. See, there's the p'liceman coming on, marching as if he was a whole regiment. Hi, mate! Wake up, there's a good fellow. Wake up, I tell you. Ye can't go to sleep on a doorstep. Hi, mate! I say.'

‘What’s the matter, sir?’ said the policeman, coming up; and at the same time a cab, driving along without a fare, drew up to see if anything which might produce a shilling or an excitement was going on in this dark corner. The policeman threw the light of his lantern upon the face of the man who, half asleep, half stupefied, leaned up against the corner of the door. Notwithstanding the dazed condition in which the unfortunate man was, the face was not in the least like that of his miserable companion or his kind. It was clear-cut in features and mild in expression, a sort of humorous smile about the mouth, the air as of a man taking his ease in the attitude with which he leaned back upon the hard support of the door. White eyelids, which seemed to conceal large and somewhat prominent eyes, with very light eyelashes, showed the extremely fair complexion, which exposure had browned and reddened in the lower part of his face. He was dressed in decent clothes of an old-fashioned cut. Altogether, he was much more like the victim than the mate of the hoarse ruffian, who kept bawling in his ears, and from time to time shaking him roughly by the arm.

‘I can’t tell you,’ said John; ‘I found the two on the steps of the office to which I belong. I can’t have them here. What can be done? The other man looks—respectable, don’t you think?’

‘I say, clear out of there,’ said the policeman, whose inspection of John’s first acquaintance had not been satisfactory. ‘Let’s have a look at the gentleman. Well, he’s had too much to drink, sir, so far as I can see. He is not one as I’ve ever seen about. He is a bit queer to look at. Them clothes is droll, to say the least, but decent enough so far as I can see.’

He was guarded, as became an official and representative of the law.

‘They’re fourteen years old,’ said the other man, ‘and that makes a difference in clo’es an’ most other things. He’s put them on to-day for the first time for fourteen year. Look at ’im. He’s come out o’ quod, poor beggar, and did not know nobody, and happened on me. I knew ’im onst, it don’t matter where. I’ve been taking him about for old acquaintance sake. And he’s dazed like, and no command over his legs, and a little drop o’ drink done for him. I call

him my mate, along o' this that we've been together in the same place. But he's a born gentleman, as ye'd see if once you heard him talk: only not being used to it—a little drop of drink——'

'You've been and hocussed him,' said the policeman, with a sudden grasp of the man's arm.

'No, by —— No, —— my soul, if I ever——' said the fellow, pouring out a flood of ready oaths.

The hoarse profanity, the entreaties and remonstrance of the rude voice, which made a clamour in the air of the night, roused the slumberer in the doorway to a state of half consciousness. He raised himself a little, and blinking at the light of the lantern with large, mild, light-coloured eyes, which were humorous and genial even in their stupefied condition, began to address the group around him with a smile.

'It's only—Joe,' he said; 'there's not much harm in—Joe. He's a—a—confirmed offender and all that. Never could get a—ticket; but he's faithful, faithful—not bad company—on the whole. I take Joe—under my protection. I've

a little money. Let him have—a comfortable bed—like mine,’ he added, falling back again with a smile full of good humour, yet not without a touch of ridicule in it, which seemed more conscious than the speaker was, and which touched the little group around with a curious mixture of feeling, subduing the tone even of the policeman, who looked at John with a bewildered air.

‘I could take him to the station, sir,’ he said, paying no attention to the exclamations of Joe, who evidently felt himself entirely rehabilitated and restored to the good opinions of his fellows by this strange statement: ‘he’d be safe enough there.’

‘It seems a pity,’ said John.

‘It do seem a pity,’ agreed the guardian of the night. ‘He don’t look a bad sort, though he’s been in trouble.’

Those who have been ‘in trouble’ come more natural to policemen than to those more prejudiced members of society who have no connection with the criminal classes. They stood round, looking at the unconscious, slumbering face supported against the blackness of the door, and lighted up still with the lingering

remains of that conscious, self-ridiculing smile.

Now John's old lodgings which he had abandoned, as he rose in the world, were near, and he felt a great melting of the heart over this man, whose face was so full of better things, yet who in all the world seemed to have only the wretched vagrant Joe, hoarse and ragged and miserable, to stand his friend. He was somewhat apt to act upon impulse, though his impulses were seldom of this reckless kind.

'I know,' he said, 'a house where he might have a lodging: but how to get him there—for it does not seem possible to rouse him.'

'Here you are, sir,' cried the cabman from behind, who was almost as hoarse as Joe. 'I'll take the gentl'man. If the bobby will lend us a hand to get him into the cab——'

'Lor', I'll get him on his feet in a moment,' cried Joe. And presently by the help of John, the policeman affording such assistance as his lantern could supply, the half-smiling, half-sleeping unfortunate was got into the cab and slowly driven away, John following as in a dream. He had responded to Joe's hoarse entreaty for 'a bob,' and he had bestowed another

upon the unsoliciting but not unexpectant policeman. He was glad when he shook them all off, and found himself alone again, following the slow movement of the cab, which crept along keeping him within sight. What was this responsibility he was taking upon his shoulders? He laughed to himself after a moment at the curious sense of something new, something of undefined importance to which he was committing himself. What was it, after all, finding a night's shelter in a decent house for a friendless being who could not concern him after, to whom he was but acting the part of the Samaritan? What more was there to say?

CHAPTER IX.

GOING BACK.

IT was with some difficulty that John persuaded his old landlady to take in his unfortunate *protégé*. But the woman had a great respect for the young man who had done so well, and allowed herself finally to be induced to do a charity, which was what he assured her it would be, at a rate of payment double that which she could have procured in the ordinary way. He went home with a curious commotion in his heart. The incident was quite new in his experience. He had never been deaf to the appeals of charity. When any of the men at the works got hurt, when there was sickness or death among them, John was known to be always ready to contribute what he could for the comfort of the sufferers or the relief of the widow. This was almost the only manner in which it

had come in his way to help his fellow-creatures. To enter of his own accord into schemes of beneficence had not occurred to him. He had shrunk even from the undertakings which Percy Spencer, when in London, had told him of, in which young men were working for the poor. John, though he was not at all humble-minded in ordinary ways, had a certain diffidence and modesty in this. He had not been conscious of any capacity in himself to exercise ‘a good influence.’ He knew too much and too little to take it up in good faith as these young men did—too much of himself, too little of the others. What he could do to help an individual who came in his way, or whom he knew, he did quietly, and this chiefly in material ways; paying rent, sending for a doctor, helping to set up a little shop, or buy a mangle. This he could do; but he could not ‘exercise a good influence:’ or, at all events, he was timid and did not try. He paid doubly and beforehand for the hesitations and alarms of his old landlady, who took in with so much doubt this poor gentleman, who was not in a condition to take care of himself, and promised to make up for any damage he might

do, should she suffer by her charity ; but John did not feel any desire to talk, or to give him good advice.

The man was got not without difficulty to bed. His aspect to the young man seemed quite different from that of the ordinary sinners in the same way, whom he had seen often enough. He had a confused look of kindness and that jovial good-nature which appears in the Bacchanalian literature of the past, not like the sodden misery of drunkenness in the present time. Perhaps this social vice, which is so terrible in its consequences, has changed its characteristics, like other things. The man seemed to have the merry twinkle in his eyes when he opened them now and then, the humorous consciousness as of a bizarre and irresponsible condition which was not culpable, which belonged to an age when indulgence was common and supposed to be a venial fault, and associated with all sorts of fun and good-fellowship. Tipsiness bears no such aspect now : it is dull, sodden, miserable, a shame to see. The victim in the present case was as different as possible from the brutal drunkards, the wretch-

ed, pale, self-conscious sinners of a higher sphere, whom John had beheld with scorn from his eminence of youthful virtue. His eyes were not bleary and sodden, as the eyes of such offenders are now-a-days, the gleam of mirth in them had no guilty look. 'If you think I don't see how ridiculous it all is, you are mistaken,' they seemed to say.

To think that John should ever have been moved to an almost sympathetic amusement by the looks of a man whom he had picked up in a state of intoxication in the street—to think that he should have been so much touched by his appearance as to pick the man up, to transport him to this familiar place, to exert himself so distinctly on behalf of an ex-convict, a criminal, a drunkard ! How was it ? he could not tell : and yet, after he had seen the unhappy man lying quietly asleep, John went away with a curious emotion in his heart. For one thing, the being to whom we have been kind, whom we have effectually served, always acquires an interest to the mind ; our own consciousness of bounty, of charity, still more of mercy, throwing a favourable light on the recipient of it. And John said to him-

self that to have left a man who had at least the remains of something better about him, who had come out of prison perhaps with the intention of leading a different life, in the hands of such a coarse ruffian as Joe, was a thing which no one would willingly do. It was found, too, by the curiosity of the landlady, who emptied the poor man's pockets in order that John might see that all was safe, that he had a considerable sum of money in his possession, which was a very strong reason why he should not be handed over in a helpless condition to the tender mercies of a penniless frequenter of the streets. John would not look over the contents of his *protégé's* pocket. He saw and counted the money at the woman's request, but the other things he folded away in a sealed packet, with that high sense of the sacredness of personal belongings which is peculiarly strong in youth.

And then he went home with the consciousness of having done a good action, which is also peculiar to his age, making his heart and step still more buoyant. It was a sort of seal to all his well-being, to his majority, to his new and complete independence. On this first day

of perfect manhood (as he thought) to have served a fellow-creature, to have perhaps delivered a soul out of pressing danger, anyhow to have secured the poor man's safety and that of his money till he should be fit to look after himself. Poor old fellow, what a pity! Was it possible he could have nobody to take care of him? And what, with that cheerful, humorous face so full of good temper and geniality, could he have done to merit imprisonment for fourteen years? John, whose conscientious life was almost included in that term, shivered as he thought of it. To be shut up in prison for fourteen years, and then to come out of it, and find no friendly face, no hand to meet his, but only those of Joe!

Next day, however, John was sent away to look after some work which was going on at a distance, and when that was completed the time had arrived when his leave of absence began, and he was free to go to Edgeley. The press of work, and then the rush of other interests and commotion, drove the poor man whom he had succoured out of his mind. He had intended vaguely to go to Mrs. Bentley's to

inquire after him when he returned to town ; but with the visit to Edgeley before him, and all the rising of things new and old in his mind, it was not wonderful if this momentary interest failed. A vague surprise that the man himself had taken no notice, also went across the surface of his thoughts, but this he soon perceived was somewhat unreasonable, since there was little ground for thinking that he was at all aware who his helper was, or whether in reality anything had been done for him. John had scarcely time indeed to think of the matter at all, until he was travelling, in the seclusion of a railway-carriage to Edgeley, a moment in which all the omissions and forgetfulness of an immediate past are apt to come into our heads. But they did not last long in John's. He was going—back. He could not call it home, after four years—having in the meantime no knowledge, save by letters at long intervals, as to what the changes were which he might find there. Susie had excused herself from accompanying him, but had promised to follow in a day or two, and John had secured for himself a lodging at Mrs. Sibley's, where Mr. Cattley still was. The very

names gave him a thrill of feeling : to pronounce them lightly again as everyday matters seemed so strange. The first return after a long absence is not like any other. When it becomes a matter of use and wont to go and come, the mind gets accustomed to the thought that life goes on in many places at a time, almost entirely unaffected by its own presence and absence. But to John the village had been suspended in a sort of crystal of memory since ever he left, and, although he knew this was impossible, he half expected he should find it so suspended, only to be restored to the current of a progressive existence on his return.

He travelled by night, as busy men do, and he could almost have believed that this fancy was real, when he arrived in the early morning and found the houses still half asleep, opening their eyes and shutters, awaking to life as he came back. He had put his portmanteau on the omnibus (which was something new ; there had been no omnibus when he left), and walked across the common in the early glory of the morning, everything so fresh and sweet around him. The hedgerow on the one side, and the

tufts of bushes and low trees on the other, were all glistening with the early dew. There were many fine things in London, and the trees in the parks were looking their best and freshest in the May weather, but John reflected that either there was no dew there, or else it fell when nobody knew, or—a still less poetical explanation, it became so black with the soot in it that it was more like ink than dew upon the leaves. But here it was a sort of elixir of life, so pure and glistening, every drop like a little heaven. He walked on slowly, willing to put off the realisation of the world he had known so well, now that he found this world so near to him. A thousand nameless odours seemed to be going up to heaven: the smell of the fresh earth, of the growing grass, of the heather that began to push upward in strong green bushes, of the gorse unfolding its honey blossoms, of the sweet briar in the hedge: and along with all these an indefinite sweetness of the morning which could not be explained, which was partly physical and partly spiritual, a sweetness that went into the very soul. John could not but remember the many times he had come along this way: but

his recollections were winterly, or they were pictures of the night, when the village lights had been shining, and the common lost in the darkness. Above all he recollected the silent drives he had taken with his mother to and fro, when he had met her for the first time, when he had disowned her and called her Emily, a memory which made his cheek burn and sting; but it was not his fault. He did not think of her as Emily any longer. He respected her and all she said and did: but his heart was not much nearer to her than when he had sat by her side with his head turned the other way, in a concentrated still opposition to her and all her ways.

These recollections and reflections chilled him a little as he walked along; but soon happier thoughts came. The scenes of his old life began to pass before him like a succession of pictures. Mr. Cattley's room, with all the books lying about, and the two photographs, her own and John's, which Elly had fastened over the curate's mantelpiece when they ended their lessons—would they still be there in the same place? and how had Mr. Cattley made up his mind to go away? and how was it possible to

imagine Percy at the reading-desk and in the pulpit as Mr. Cattley's successor? This thought made John laugh. And then he seemed to see the rectory garden rolling out before him, and Elly and himself coming so very quietly down the walk after that kiss which had been such a solemnity. Would she recollect that, and grow red (as John felt himself to do all alone in the soft, uninquisitive light of the May morning), when she met him again? and had she remembered what she had said about the pear-tree and her algebra, which she was to study there? She was never very good at her algebra: that was the very best thing she could have been doing when she wanted to think of John. He came along smiling, thinking of all that, not of the old house and the old people, which were too sacred, which were put off to a time when he should be less conscious of the curiosity and amusement and wonder of coming back to the old place, and seeing it awake, as the 'Sleeping Beauty' must have seen the world awake round her, rubbing its eyes and stretching forth after years of suspended animation, taking up once more its natural life.

The 'Green Man' stood open, but not with the dissipated air, the look of tremendous wickedness and riot which it once had borne. He thought it an innocent-looking little village ale-house now, with no harm about it: and Johnson, blinking over his early pipe at the door, no monster at all, not even bloated, but very much like other men. Mrs. Box had finished taking down her shutters, and the perambulator stood at her door just as of old, and the milkman was coming along with his shining cans, looking up and shading his eyes from the sun, as he looked in obedience to a question from the woman he was serving, as to who the gentleman was who was crossing the road towards Mrs. Sibley's. 'One o' Mr. Percy's friends,' the milkman said, by way of maintaining his character for universal knowledge, yet not committing himself. It was curious to John to see that nobody recognised him, neither the porter at the station nor the postman whom he met, and whom he felt so strong an inclination to stop and ask for the letters as of old. He felt pleased, and yet a little troubled and somewhat desolate. The great difference there must be in him he took for granted must be to his

advantage: and yet it was dismal to pass like a stranger through a place which he knew so well.

Mrs. Sibley, however, who expected him, knew John, and received him with an enthusiastic welcome, and in due time so did Mr. Cattle, who hurried downstairs, half-dressed, to grasp his old pupil by the hand.

‘Is it possible that it is you, John? I doubt, really, whether I should have known you. You have grown a great deal, and got a very manly look. Are you really only twenty-one? I should have thought you four or five years older if I had not known.’

‘I’ve been knocking a great deal about the world,’ said John.

He was pleased to be supposed to look older, like most lads of his age.

‘Yes, I know. I’ve always looked up on the map where you were, to tell Elly. She likes to see the exact place and find out all about it. You’ve not—no; of course you cannot have seen Elly since you came?’

‘I have come straight from the station,’ said John. ‘I did not so much as see anyone stir

ring at the windows in the rectory as I passed.'

'I am surprised at that,' said the curate. 'She was so anxious to be the first to see you. She had half a mind to go to the station. But I thought it better not, and on the whole so did she, for Percy—that is to say, he is apt to take fancies in his head.'

'What fancy could he take into his head?' John asked, 'that could concern me?'

The curate cleared his throat, and after a moment changed the subject as well as he could.

'You find me still here, John, though perhaps I should have gone before now. For my part I daresay I should have stayed on all my life: but when Percy got old enough to hold the curacy it seemed to be thought that I should go.'

'I am sure they will all miss you dreadfully,' said John.

'Do you think so?' said Mr. Cattley, with doubt in his tone. He sighed a little, but then cheered up again. 'Well, perhaps it is true that I ought to go. I've been here a long time, and perhaps, as Mr. Egerton says, if I delay longer—but I'm a man of use and wont, John,

perhaps too much so—perhaps too much so.’ Mr. Cattley sighed softly again, then roused himself, and added, with sudden briskness, ‘But you must want your breakfast—of course after travelling all night you want your breakfast. Mrs. Sibley, I hope you have been thinking of Mr. John’s breakfast—for you know he has been travelling all night.’

‘It’s quite ready, sir,’ said Mrs. Sibley, ‘and a pleasure it is, sir, if you’ll excuse me saying it, to see him again.’

‘Why should I excuse you saying it? It is the most natural thing in the world to say. We all think it a pleasure. And tell me, John,’ said the curate, ‘do you find this night travelling suit you? I know business people think it saves time, but it seems to me to knock you up next day.’

‘I have been so used to it,’ said John. ‘I don’t mind. I can sleep nearly as well as if I were in bed. In some places where I have been, all the best trains go by night, and in America, where the distances are so great, you have to make up your mind to travel night and day.’

‘Dear me, what a traveller you have grown,’

said Mr. Cattley. 'It is astonishing to look at you and to think you have been in America and at the ends of the earth.'

John laughed a little and settled his collar, and felt the superiority of his position.

'I have been about a great deal,' he said, with conscious modesty. He could not but feel that he was coming back in the way he had wished and anticipated, with colours flying and drums beating, and the certainty of having done not only as well as anyone could have done, but far better than could have been expected. Mr. Cattley unwillingly going away to his living, and Percy stepping into the post which had been kept thus warm for him, were fulfilling the ordinary law of nature. But John might just as well have done nothing in particular, have contented himself with holding his place and no more. He sat down at the table in the old bow-windowed room, where all his early education had been given him, with a still warmer thrill of self-approval. It is so seldom that one can feel one's self to have done more than one's duty. The two little photographs were still over the mantelpiece where Elly had placed

them. The room was exactly the same as it had always been: yet in himself what a difference! But the difference in his case was all for the better. It was not perhaps altogether the same with Mr. Cattley. And with the others, too, how would it be?

CHAPTER X.

THE WELCOME.

‘HULLO, Jack, is this really you?’

The speaker was the Rev. Percy Spencer, as completely arrayed a curate as could be found in all the parishes of England. John sprang up from his seat, and contemplated him with an amused scrutiny which suddenly ended in a burst of laughter. Percy did not refuse to join a little, but only a little, in the laugh, conscious of the difference between his long clerical coat and high waistcoat, and the soft hat he held in his hands, and those gayer garments, resplendent ties and canes in the height of the fashion, which had distinguished him in his university days. John had not seen him since he had assumed the severe simplicity of this priestly garb, and he was willing to allow a

momentary merriment; but he soon resumed the little air of seriousness and responsibility which became his position.

‘I daresay,’ he said, ‘you find me a little changed; so I am. It makes a vast difference on a man, on his feelings as well as on his clothes, when he becomes a priest. But, all the same, I’m delighted to see you, and I hope Cattley has given you a good breakfast after your journey.’

Cattley! John, notwithstanding that he felt himself rather a fine fellow, had preserved, probably because of having been so far removed from the scene of them, all the traditions and reverential usages of his youth, and to have called his old tutor Cattley would have been no more possible to him than to have thrown stones at the old church-tower which presided over the village. Percy, too, thought himself a fine fellow, a much finer fellow than John, and the young layman naturally saw the absurd aspect of that conviction in the person of the young priest.

‘I am very well,’ he said, ‘I have had a capital breakfast, and everything here looks

delightful and like itself—even Mr. Cattley ; only you and I have changed, I think.'

'You're not so big as you promised to be,' said Percy, with satisfaction. 'I thought you'd have grown twice that height. Dick is six foot, don't you know. That's all very well for one in a family, but you can't go on doing it. I suppose you're going now to see—Aunt Mary? You're expected, of course. Cattley, there's a good fellow, do put me up a little to the manners and customs of Feather Lane.'

'If I go now will it be too early for—the ladies?' said John, 'as I see you've got business on hand.'

'Oh, not at all; no business in particular; only I'm taking hold of the work, and Cattley is giving it up. Things are a little different, don't you know, from what they were when he took it up. I daresay I shall have to make changes,' Percy said.

'Every new man does that,' said mild Mr. Cattley, 'and undoes them again two or three times probably before he finds the right way.'

'I hope,' said Percy, 'I shan't be so long about it as that; but if you're ready, Jack, I'll

step along with you. You mightn't find Aunt Mary by yourself. She's busier than ever in the parish, more busy than she has any occasion to be ; but ladies seldom attain the *juste milieu*.'

Mr. Cattley's eyes flashed a little at this, but he only permitted himself to say,

'You must give up those pretty speeches about ladies if you mean to do much good in the parish. Shall I see you back to dinner, John ?'

'They're sure to keep him to lunch,' said Percy, not sorry to pay back to 'Old Cattley' an answering prick : for the curate, in deference perhaps to Mrs. Sibley, had always continued to call his mid-day meal his dinner. 'Hadn't you better come too ? Aunt Mary will want both of you ; and then you can tell her yourself when you are going away. I hope I can give as good as I get,' said this young ecclesiastic, as he led the way out of the house. 'Old Cattley is too much of a good thing with his advices and his prophecies, as if we had not learnt a thing or two since his time. And he doesn't want to go, don't you know, not a bit. He has hung on here years longer than he ought to

have done. My father did not mind waiting till I was ready to step in ; but an old fellow like that is quite out of date for a curate. I'll have a great deal of trouble to work the parish into what's wanted now.'

'Perhaps I don't know what's wanted now,' said John, with some suppressed resentment. 'I always thought Mr. Cattley the model of everything a clergyman should be.'

'That's a very nice little speech,' said the Rev. Percy; 'but, bless your heart, he's not a churchman at all—not a bit of him. Even Aunt Mary sees it now. He's so much her slave, that she has always stuck to him, but I think even she sees it now.'

There was a little pause, and then John said, falteringly,

'I hope Mrs. Egerton is quite well?'

'Oh! she's well enough, thanks. She's grown stout. Ladies of her age generally do. She likes to mess about in the parish, and Cattley has always given in to her: but I mean to put my foot down, and make an end of that sort of thing. I shall have it entirely in my hands, of

course ; for my father, you know, doesn't trouble himself much to interfere.'

'And I hope the rector is—quite well?' said John.

'Oh, thanks, he's well enough.'

There was not a word of Elly on the one side nor the other. John felt a chill, so far as he was concerned, which he could not himself understand. He had been so full of her, thinking more of her than of all the rest of the village put together. And now he did not even inquire for her! He walked along the road under the fresh green of the trees, while Percy entered more largely into all the new things he was about to do. John did not take very much interest in it. It would have pleased him a great deal more to hear the simplest thing about her whose name he had not ventured to pronounce. It was but a short way between Mr. Cattley's door and the rectory, but Percy had managed to unfold a great many of his plans, and show clearly enough that he meant to turn the parish upside down, before they reached the door. John, to tell the truth, gave

but a very distracted attention. His eyes were inspecting the house, every window and opening. It seemed so strange that she should not at least be looking out for him somewhere, expecting him. Elly! Why, she had been about the same as a sister. She had been more than his sister: she had been his comrade and play-fellow: and to think that he had not the courage to ask for her, and that she did not so much as look out of a window to see whether he was coming! It was neither possible nor natural that such a thing should be.

Percy's voice ran on in a sort of complacent sing-song, while this thought took possession of John's mind. What did he care for what the fellow was going to do in the parish? His self-assurance was intolerable to John, notwithstanding that he himself, in his way, was quite as much disposed to think well of his own new methods, and despise his elders, as Percy could do. But that is a thing which looks much less natural in another than it does in our own case. And John's suspense and surprise were becoming more and more highly wrought. Could it be possible that Elly was not at home,

that she was absent just when he looked for her, that she might perhaps never have heard that he was coming? This thought roused a great anger in his mind—he jumped at it with a flash of sudden conviction. She had never received his letter. She had never heard——

When suddenly the door opened, and some one came out, meeting them: a young lady nearly as tall as John, with brown hair of a warm shade, plaited in endless coils round the back of her head, with a stately carriage, a long white dress almost touching the ground; but, what was far better than all the rest, two hands held out.

‘After all, I was the first to see you,’ she cried. ‘Oh, Jack, did he tell you? I was looking over the garden-wall when you passed: but you never looked up. Oh, Jack, welcome home!’

And this was Elly! He took the hands she held out to him, and grasped them tight, and stared at her, but with changing looks, and the most extraordinary revolution going on in his mind. So this was Elly! He felt himself grow red, he felt himself stare; he was speechless,

and had not a word to say. He had a kind of certainty that he must be disappointing to her, and that she expected him, naturally, to say something. But he could not find a word to say.

At last she tried to draw her fingers out of his clasp, and grew red, and laughed.

‘I daresay it is my fault. My hands are not so solid as they used to be. You—you hurt me a little, Jack!’

He dropped them as if they had been on fire, and burst into excuses.

‘How horrible of me!—how disgusting. As if I oughtn’t to have known. As if I shouldn’t have been sure——’ And here John’s voice seemed to die away in his throat, and he stood, now averting his eyes, now giving her a sudden shame-faced glance, crimson covering his face, and shame and perturbation his soul.

Why should he have been so much ashamed? and why should the sight of Elly have discomposed him so? Who can tell? It was a climax, and it was at the same time a contradiction. *That* Elly! How was he ever to suppose she would grow to be like *that*? And yet of course that

was just how she must have grown, he said to himself—or rather, which is truer, himself said to him—as he stood staring, lost in disappointment and trouble, and self-disgust and delight. And the strange thing was, that she too grew confused and embarrassed under his gaze. She had been, perhaps, to tell the truth, a little embarrassed from the first, not knowing how to get the first meeting over, anxious to get it over, and have the new system of intercourse begun.

‘Well, Sandford,’ said Percy, ‘you seem to find my sister as much changed as you found me? Where’s Aunt Mary, Elinor? Of course she is full of curiosity to see the great conqueror that is to be——’

‘Of course she wants to see Jack, if that is what you mean,’ said Elly. She made a little pause before his name, and grew red as she said it, which was wonderful, confusing, extraordinary beyond measure to John, who did not know what to make of it all, neither of himself nor of her, nor of Percy, who called him Sandford and Elly Elinor. Something had happened; something had changed in a way he had not thought of nor anticipated: and he did not know whether

he was most happy or unhappy at the change. He followed Elly in, looking at her, at her tallness, her slimness, the sweep of her long dress, her shining coils of hair, not tossing on her shoulders any longer in those tumbled curls, everyone of which had seemed to have an independent life of its own, but so smooth and orderly in endless plaits. He was not quite sure if he was walking on solid ground or floating after her upon the golden morning air in which her white figure seemed to float glorified. He had to shake himself out of this dream, as Mrs. Egerton came out with hands outstretched, and the rector in the background, who never took much notice, added a word of welcome. They were both exactly the same, the lady a little stouter, as her nephew had said; and the house was the same, restoring his balance a little by means of its steady unalterableness, every ornament in its habitual place, nothing changed.

So long as he did not look at Elly, John felt the giddiness go off, and his head got steady again. He was taken into Mrs. Egerton's room and had to give an account of himself,

which, stimulated by her questions, he did in great detail. Elly kept a little behind, out of sight, as this examination went on. Perhaps she had guessed by sympathy or otherwise that the sight of her made John's head go round. Mrs. Egerton was immensely interested in John's account of himself, but it seemed by-and-by to pall upon Percy, who went out declaring that he must go to his work and that 'Old Cattley' was waiting for him, a phrase which John thought did not please Mrs. Egerton any more than it pleased himself. Percy added a word to his sister as he went out.

'Isn't this your day for the schools, Nell?' which that young lady did not receive with much greater favour. There was a little pause of joint disapproval as he disappeared. In John's opinion Percy had grown insufferable in his new developement: my sister, Elinor, Nell—all these names, as applied to Elly, were equally intolerable. The pretensions of this new-made priest were more than any man could put up with, John felt, not being at all aware that in himself there were elements of self-complacency very clear to spectators too.

‘I suppose you are not going to the schools to-day, Elly?’ Mrs. Egerton said.

‘No, Aunt Mary, I never said I would go always;—and it is not every day that—Jack comes home.’

These words were delivered with a little suddenness and a tone as of defiance, but Mrs. Egerton did not take up the glove.

‘Percy would like to keep us all to our duties,’ she said, with an ease which made the success of that effort very doubtful, ‘but we don’t at present see our way to absolute obedience. Since you are not going to the schools, sit down, Elly, and keep still. No doubt you distract John’s attention, fluttering about like that. I am sure you do mine.’

John did not say anything. It distracted him still more when she came at her aunt’s order and sat down within sight, and let him see how carefully she was listening, and what interest she took in his narrative—which henceforward became a very broken affair, chiefly elicited by questions to which he replied. He had all the desire in the world to interest and satisfy Elly, but his own interest in all her looks and move-

ments was so great, and his anxiety not to lose a word she said, that the desire was balked even by its very warmth. Perhaps Mrs. Egerton perceived the ground of the disturbance in the young man's mind, for she came suddenly to the present, after he began to waver in his narrative of the past.

‘And so,’ she said, ‘you have come to settle about the old house, John? Have you been there yet?’

‘No,’ he said, ‘not yet. I did not care to go at once. Being with Mr. Cattley was like old times, without the pain of contrast.’

‘Ah! and that’s a pleasure you will not have very long. I am glad you keep to the “Mr. Cattley,” John. I expect to hear Percy call me *Mary tout court* one of these days. I am glad some of you boys have a little sense of what is befitting. Mr. Cattley is going, you know.’

‘I am sorry, Mrs. Egerton: and yet I suppose——’

‘One ought to be glad? That is just my feeling. One ought to be glad. He never would have—married or done anything else

that is necessary at his age, or asserted himself and his independence, here. But come, tell me : you are going to settle about the old house. Do you mean to sell it, or to let it, or what do you mean to do ?

‘I want to do a silly thing,’ said John.

‘Well ! out with it. What is your silly thing ? You young men are all so admirably sensible and awake to your own interests. I am rather glad to hear of anything that can be called so.’

‘I should like,’ he said, ‘to keep the house in my own hands. My sister is coming to join me presently.’

‘But you couldn’t stay here—at your age, and getting on so well in your profession.’

‘Oh, no ! But it used to be a dream of mine to keep it up in the old way. Would it be very silly ? Susie could come when she pleased, and my mother if she pleased. It would be something to think of and come back to.’

‘But then you would require to furnish it and keep some one in it.’

John looked at Elly, and she at him. It was almost the first time that their glances had met. There was a flash of private communication,

confidential, charged with intelligence : and then over both the young faces there came something like a flame, a flush of recollection and emotion. *That* had been their last interview : and how much there was in it which it was confusing to recall now.

‘What are you looking at each other for, you two?’

‘You know, Aunt Mary!’ It was the first time Elly had spoken. ‘The two dear old chairs. Jack, they have been in my room ever since. Often and often I have wondered if they knew. I have taken such care of them. When you take them back, it will seem like losing old friends.’

‘Oh! yes, I remember,’ said Mrs. Egerton. She looked from one to another with a slightly roused look; perhaps she had not been alarmed before. She saw a little excitement in both faces, an unusual colour and light in their eyes, which showed more feeling than was at all necessary. And in the atmosphere altogether there was a sort of electricity, something that was different from the everyday calm.

The watchful family guardian was startled.

She had not thought there was any danger. When Percy had fumed and indulged in whatever is the clerical substitute for swearing, and declared that he would not allow any nonsense between that fellow and Elly, his aunt had put him down with calm decision, and an assurance that nothing of the kind was possible. That look produced a change as rapid as itself in Mrs. Egerton's frame of mind.

‘Do you know,’ she said, with no perceptible change from the maternal kindness of her previous tone, ‘I think it would be rather a silly thing. It would bind you to this little place quite out of the way, with which you have, so to speak, no family connection, for none of your people have *belonged* here ; and you would entail upon yourself a considerable expense, for you can't furnish a house with two old chairs, whatever may be their associations. I don't think I would do it, if I were you.’

CHAPTER XI.

THE OLD HOUSE.

JOHN was not convinced, though he was a little discouraged, by Mrs. Egerton's speech. To say that none of his people *belonged* there when the two, the only two who had trained and loved him, were lying side by side, unalterable inhabitants; and when all the associations of his boyhood, all he knew of home, was in this place! He was a little aggrieved, wounded and troubled by that phrase. They had always been so kind. It had never been made known to him in any way that he did not belong—that is, that he was not one of the known and accredited families who alone were on the same level as the Spencers. He knew indeed that he was not on the same level with them—he could remember, now he thought of it, the gratitude of

his grandparents and their gratification at his adoption into the circle of the rectory. And there was nothing unkind in what Mrs. Egerton had said; perhaps she meant nothing at all; and, if she did mean anything, it was the kindest, mildest suggestion that he had perhaps no particular right to assume a place as one of the village aristocracy.

If she did mean that, John said to himself that he was not going to be discouraged by such a small matter. He was not, as a point of fact, connected with any great family like the Spencers. He was perhaps nobody, going to be the architect of his own fortunes; but why should he have less love for the scene of his early associations because of that? He went away a little earlier than he might otherwise have done, after the luncheon to which Mr. Cattley came with Percy, though he had said he should not. It was a very pleasant luncheon; nothing could have been brighter than the table, and the looks of the two ladies at least. There was a little too much clerical talk, talk about the parish; but then perhaps that was natural in a clerical house, and under

the stimulus of a brand-new curate, just in harness, and much enamoured of his new position and power.

Percy was a little overpowering, all-pervasive, bringing back the conversation if it ever strayed for a moment from the regulation subjects, and Mr. Cattley was a little subdued, saying little, evidently feeling the oppression of this novelty, as well as the deepening influence of his approaching departure. John himself, sitting opposite to Elly, not able to avoid looking at her, getting accustomed to her new aspect, was not capable of a very lively part in the conversation. But yet it was all pleasant, and everybody was kind. He walked away alone afterwards down the village street, saying this to himself. Nobody could be more kind. John had no other friends to receive him in that way. When he had been in America and other places far from home, holding an important place in 'the works,' he had been thus entertained on various occasions; but at home he knew nobody, and lived in his own rooms in a very recluse fashion. To be so familiar at any family table, to be called by

his Christian name—(though Percy said nothing but Sandford) was an unaccustomed pleasure, and one that he could enjoy only here. But, nevertheless, a cloud had come—even since the morning, since his first welcome. Then there had not been any cloud—now it was only to be divined from austere movements of Mrs. Egerton's eyelids and tones of her voice: and yet John felt that it was there. 'A little place quite out of the way, with which you have no real family connection.' That was true enough: he understood what she meant, though he had never thought of it, or been moved by it before. The Sandfords were not established in the county, like the Spencers—they were nobodies, most likely: grandfather and grandmother had not been on the same level as the rector and Mrs. Egerton. It was quite true. It was only a cloud like a man's hand, not so much. But still it was enough to spread a cold chill through that warm, sunshiny, delightful air of May.

With this in his mind, John walked down the street to see the old house. Notwithstanding the chill, he had not in the least degree changed

his mind. If it was a silly thing, he would still do it. He did not pretend to be wise. He would please himself, whatever Mrs. Egerton might say; indeed, what she had said had confirmed him in this his intention, as sensible opposition so often does confirm us in the silly things which our hearts desire. And, when he got to the house, he found, to his surprise, that it would not be so difficult as he had supposed. It appeared that a good deal of the simple, old furniture had not been sold. And he felt as if it might have been a cleaning-day; such as some he recollected, and that grandmamma might be in some of the other rooms, taking refuge from the tubs and the char-woman, who had always been called in to help Sarah on such occasions. His heart and his eyes filled as he went over the house. The recollections of his childhood took possession of him, both sad and pleasant. All the happy past of his life had been spent there. He had known no vexation or misery there; nothing but hallowing grief, which is the one painfulest thing upon which the heart can go back without bitterness. He thought of them going away one after the other, and of his own desolation and the empti-

ness of the house ; but how sweet these recollections were in comparison with what followed : and how much sweeter, tenderer, more delightful the happiness then, than even that buoyancy of well-being and self-satisfaction with which he had come back !

John retraced his steps after that survey with a subdued and softened heart ; and he met Elly in the middle of the village street. She was walking quickly when he perceived her first, with her head turned towards his house, and every appearance of having a distinct aim and purpose in her walk. But, when she saw him, her intention seemed to change. Her aim suddenly failed her, her pace slackened, and an embarrassed look of not knowing where she was going came into her face. John did not understand this at first, until it suddenly flashed upon him that she might be going to meet him there. No doubt she perceived the chill that had come over him, and had hastened to console him. He hurried on to meet her, but, when he did so, found that she was turning off in another direction, with a look which was full of embarrassment.

‘I thought perhaps you were coming to take

another look at the poor old place,' he said.

'Oh, no,' cried Elly, but her face contradicted her words.

'I have just been going over it: the garden looks the same as ever: they have changed nothing; and the rooms could very easily be restored; they were never very much, never anything fine.'

'They always seemed delightful to me,' said Elly, simply.

'I was very presuming to ask that of you about the chairs,' he said. 'I don't know that I ever fully understood it before to-day. I am sure you will consider how young I was, Miss Spencer, only a boy——'

'Miss Spencer!' she cried. 'Jack, is that my name?'

'I suppose it must be,' he said. 'To come back and find you—as you are: after being so silly as to hope that we should meet just the same as ever, and that I should find you a child still——'

'Then you were disappointed in me, Jack?' she said, in a low tone.

'Disappointed!' he cried. Then, after a pause:

‘Of course, it comes to the same thing. You are a young lady now; you’re not my old schoolfellow. I daren’t speak to you as I used, or think of you as I used. Many a dreary time, when I’d nothing else to be a little comfort, I’ve thought of what you said, that you would learn your algebra under the pear-tree and think of me.’

John was sad enough, for all the differences rushed upon his mind, and seemed to push him away from her side; and yet he could not but smile, thinking of the algebra which Elly never could learn. She understood him, for she smiled too.

‘I gave up the algebra a long time ago,’ she said, ‘almost as soon as you went away—for how could I learn it without you to help me? But I still kept going to the pear-tree all the same, and—thinking of you.’

‘That was very good of you, Elly.’

‘Ah, come, that’s something like,’ she cried. ‘Do you think, Mr. Sandford, whatever happened, I should ever call you anything but Jack?’

‘That’s another thing—that’s natural; what could I be else? You may call me Jack, Jack,

like a dog, if you please ; but that doesn't mean that I should be wanting in any respect to you.'

She gave him a look, half entreating, half upbraiding, and then she said, quietly,

'Were you going to the—churchyard, Jack?'

'Yes.'

'May I go, too?'

'Oh, will you, Elly?'

That was the best way to dispel the prudery that had taken hold upon him. He could not be anything but natural beside *their* graves. This was what Elly said to herself, knowing very well, all the while, that his prudery, as she called it, was the most natural of all, and that he and she sedately walking along together to make that sacred visit, were boy and girl no longer, and could not be Elly and Jack to each other again, save in a spasmodic and artificial way. Did not she know this as well, better than he?—for, naturally, the subject was one which presented itself in a stronger light to Elly than it could to John. But, nevertheless, it was agreeable to her to meet him in this way, and get over the dangerous barrier, if not permanently, at least for a little while. They went

to the grave, all covered with May flowers, and kept in careful order, as John could see, and where Elly busied herself in picking out imaginary weeds and faded blooms leaving the young man free to think or pray, as he pleased.

It is to be feared that John thought more of her than of *them*. He gave them a momentary thought in their stillness and calmness, so long ago delivered out of all commotion and trouble, and then his mind fled to matters more urgent, to the young creature bending over them, who was so familiar yet so unfamiliar, who woke so many bewildering, new sensations in his heart. John felt that it was intended to take Elly from him, and did not know how to oppose this, yet was determined to oppose it. It would not be Elly's fault if she was separated from him. What was he to do to keep hold of her, to prevent the severance? He was grieved at himself that this was the foremost subject in his mind at his grandparents' grave. But how could he help it? and they, if they were permitted to see, if they knew anything about it, they would understand; John felt that if they perceived him standing thus over their last resting-place, as

we instinctively feel that those whom we have lost must do, that they would not resent the perturbation of his mind or think that it meant neglect or forgetfulness, but would understand entirely and without mistake ; for have they not ‘larger, other eyes than ours?’ After a while, he went away and took a little turn among the graves by himself, Elly all this time stooping over the spot, and picking off every leaf that marred the perfection of the flowers. When he returned he put his hand softly upon her arm, and called her to come away.

‘Elly,’ he said, ‘I have something more on my mind than these graves. They are not there. They would not like me to give myself up to it as if they were there.’

‘No, Jack,’ she said.

‘Therefore they would not blame me, and you shouldn’t, for what I am going to say. It was you I was thinking of, Elly. It is you that mean home to me, it appears, and all that I care for. Elly, there are other ways of thinking at the rectory : they will not let it be if they can help it.’

She trembled a little, and asked, softly,

‘What will they not let be, Jack?’

‘Oh, Elly, that I should look to you so for sympathy; that you should be my dear friend; that you should be Elly to me. You allow me to say it, but they wouldn’t. And what am I to do without you?’ he said, in full sincerity and alarm. He did not at all think of her in the matter, which perhaps was natural enough.

‘Don’t think of that, Jack. Call me what you have always called me, and think of me as you have always thought. If you give it up as if you were frightened, that may put what you say into their heads.’

‘But I see the justice of it,’ said John. ‘You are not a little girl, but a beautiful young lady. What right has a fellow like me, without any recommendations, with nothing in his favour except being very fond of you, what right have I to call you Elly? My judgment agrees with theirs, though I think it will break my heart.’

‘I see no occasion for any judgment on the matter,’ said Elly, raising her head with a certain pride. ‘If you think so, I can’t help it. But I’ve always been allowed to have an opinion of my own: and since I choose to be your

friend as we have been all our lives, and to call you Jack—and be Elly to you—let them, if they have any objections, make them to me.’

‘How sweet you are and how you look! like a guardian angel,’ cried poor John, ‘but they will not let that be, either. For they will say I have no right to appeal to you at all, that I ought to know better; that I am a man and have been about the world, and you are only a girl——’

‘If you think I am *only* a girl,’ cried Elly, with great offence, ‘it can’t be any matter to you whether I stand by you or not, a thing of so little account!’

‘You know that is not what I mean,’ said the boy, with a long-drawn breath that was almost a sob. He, who was so much older than his age, felt now what a young, helpless, impotent being he was before all that force of opposition and good sense and fact. ‘I wish,’ he cried, looking at her with a certain fond impatience, ‘that you were only a girl as you used to be, with your hair waving upon your shoulders—I wish you had put off growing up for a few years, Elly! You are a woman now, and as good as a queen. And it is right they should keep every-

thing from you that is not the best. I understand it quite well, and I agree with it, though it is against myself.'

Elly flushed and grew pale again while he was making this speech: and matters had grown very serious, for there was no telling what in his excited condition he might say next. She looked at him for a moment doubtfully, and then she put her hand on his arm in a way she had often done when they were boy and girl together, not to lean upon him, you may be sure, which was not at all Elly's way, but to push him on before her on the way which she had determined was that he ought to go.

'I don't know what is the good of talking like this,' she said, 'making yourself unhappy and me too. Wait till somebody objects. What is the good of going and meeting bother before it comes? It is time enough to stand on the defensive when somebody attacks us. You were always fond of making sure that something was going to happen: and generally nothing happened. Do you remember the time when we upset the ink bottle over Mr. Cattley's sermon—when you expected for a whole week

we should get into disgrace, and he only laughed to Aunt Mary about it, and did nothing to us at all?’

‘I remember about the sermon and the ink-bottle,’ said John, too young, even in the excited state of his feelings, not to be moved in the first place to self-defence, ‘but I thought it was——’

‘Oh, never mind what you thought—it came all right,’ cried Elly, with a little impatience. But, as a matter of fact, John could not forget, though she puzzled him for a moment by that sudden imputation of causeless forebodings that it was Elly who had been afraid.

CHAPTER XII.

SUSIE.

SUSIE arrived a few days later, having left John time, as she believed, to resume his relations with his old friends, and get himself received upon such foundations as were practicable in the change of circumstances. It was a subject which she and her mother had talked over often with different opinions. For it was apparent to both that the question was very doubtful as to how John going back, no longer a boy, but a man, no longer an equal in the school-work which had united him to these friends of youth, but divorced from all their ways and traditions in the path of practical life, would be received by them. Mrs. Sandford had been of opinion that the bland and patronising woman who had attempted to fathom her own circumstances in a ten-minutes' interview, would sum-

marily drop the young man, who was the son of a matron in a hospital, and had no standing of any kind which could place him on a level with her family. So would the young clergyman. 'Clergymen are never indifferent to social inequalities,' she said. And it was her severe opinion that the only way to demonstrate to John the fact of his practical severance from all those boyish ties was to let him return to Edgeley and see for himself that kindness shown to a boy was a very different thing from friendship accorded to a man.

'Mother, you are sending him there to be wounded and trampled on,' Susie had said: to which Mrs. Sandford had replied with a smile, 'Not if you are right, Susie.'

But, nevertheless, this was most likely what the stern woman meant, to prove to him of how little worth was the friendship upon which he had built, that sort of amateur motherhood and sisterhood of the ladies at Edgeley, who had beguiled his heart in his youth into a faith in them which his real mother did not believe they would ever justify. She was not aware, perhaps, of any taint of jealousy in her own mind, any

remnant of the inevitable wound which she had shown so little, but which she had still felt, in the days when he had hotly resisted her influence, and told her she was Emily. Mrs. Sandford had been very magnanimous. She had not punished John in any way, not even by a taunt, for that cruel utterance of his youthful despair; but perhaps there had lingered in her heart a tone of vindictiveness towards the lady who had been so kind to him—so strangely kind, the mother thought, but whose regard was no doubt so artificial, so little likely to survive the pressure of years. She was willing that he should find this out, that he should be undeceived. The blow might be a keen one, but it was necessary, she said to herself.

Susie was indignant at this intention. She saw in it a still more cold-blooded aspect than that which it really bore, and John had no sooner gone than she felt herself a sort of accomplice exposing him to a terrible ordeal for no rational end: for to Susie's softer nature the dispelling of John's dream, if it should be dispelled, was in itself an evil, not, as his mother thought, an advantage. The two days which

she had arranged to stay behind him seemed long to her, a lingering delay, in which harm that she might have prevented was perhaps being done. She was eager to start, to go to the succour of the poor boy whose castles in the air were perhaps cast down by this time, and his trust betrayed. And why should his dream-castles have been demolished? They did nobody any harm, and they kept his heart warm. Susie said to herself that she would like to have somebody to believe in, of whom she could always be sure that they liked and remembered her. Even if they should never do her any good, if they did not like her enough for any practical advantage, still to believe in them as poor John had done in his Edgeley friends, would be a pleasant thing. Susie's life had not been gay. She was neither discontented nor did she complain: neither the one nor other were in her nature; but she said to herself that if she had friends like John's friends she would take good care not to put their devotion to any severe test. She would not try them whether they were true or not, but would believe they were true, and cling to that faith

as long as they took no steps to convince her of the contrary. Some people think it is best to know the truth at all hazards. She had no such disastrous curiosity. She would have been content to believe.

Susie was very anxious for her brother's first look, which she thought would tell her more than he was at all likely to tell in words. If she found him depressed and subdued she would know what had happened—that his mother's policy had been successful, that he was disenchanted, and his fond illusions gone. But this was not John's aspect when she sprang out to meet him as the train arrived, and saw him waiting on the little platform in the twilight of the soft evening. How silent it was, how quiet when the train went shrieking on into the night, and the brief bustle was over! The air, almost dark, seemed infinite, stretching away into the unseen across the common, full of the breadth and freshness of the sky, and space unbroken for miles by any obstacle. She felt the charm of the wide atmosphere, the soft enlargement of the darkening world about, and the freshness and dewy look of John's eyes,

with a sensation of refreshment and relief. He was not disenchanted at least, whatever had happened to him. He took her home, not saying very much, feeling the excitement and surprise of the home-coming in a way which Susie, who knew nothing about it, and to whom any house in the village was the same as any other, could not possibly feel it. John had been very busy re-establishing the little old house which had been so dear. The two old chairs had been brought from the rectory, Elly herself accompanying them, and he and she together had reverently put them back in their old place. It looked exactly as it had done when the old people left it, as John led his sister over the threshold. Elly and he had gone over this little scene in anticipation with great feeling.

‘Jack, you will say to her, “Welcome home:” and when she looks round and sees everything as it always was——’

‘But she never knew it in the old time,’ John felt bound to say against his will.

‘Her heart will tell her,’ said Elly, with high conviction : and they looked round together and

felt for Susie—so much more than it was possible Susie could feel.

He carried out this little programme quite simply and fully with the greatest faithfulness. He kissed her as he led her in, and said,

‘Susie dear, welcome home.’

‘Home,’ she said, with a little start, ‘is this where you used to live?’

‘It is where we all used to live. It is our home, where we always were. These are grandfather’s and grandmother’s chairs on each side of the fire. Most of the things here belonged to them. We have got no home to speak of anywhere else. Susie, I am always going to keep it, as I intended. It shall always be home to come back to when we please.’

Susie looked round with astonished eyes—not with so much emotion as they had hoped, but with much astonishment and some pleasure, and perhaps at the bottom of her heart a little amusement at the impressive way in which she was introduced into the little parlour, which did not look anything very remarkable. But presently her eye was caught by something she, too, remembered; some old article which had

belonged to the old people even in her time, which brought a flood of associations to her heart: and she suddenly sat down in one of the old chairs and cried a little, thinking of things that were further back than any clear memory John had. How Elly had divined, he said to himself! Her heart had told her, as Elly said! To find how right Elly was, gave John almost more pleasure than to feel that Susie appreciated what he had done.

They had taken their first meal together, and she had gone upstairs to arrange her 'things,' that first necessity for a woman who has not a maid to do it for her, leaving John sitting in grave but wistful satisfaction in his familiar place. He had been very busy for two days past and was glad to sit still and rest—and he was happy, yet sad in a luxurious delicious melancholy such as is the atmosphere and background of life at a certain stage. He felt a little pang as he looked at the two old chairs, and half regretted for them that they had been brought away out of Elly's room, and felt for himself that they had a charm, a sort of perfume hanging about them from being so long there,

and wished for Elly to tell this to—not Susie, though she was the heroine of the evening. He felt that he wanted to say it to Elly. He wanted to talk to Elly, to have her there—which was impossible. He was very fond of his sister; but it was Elly he wished to communicate his thought to, and whom he longed to see coming in, sitting down—which, as has been said, was impossible. She had been a great deal with him during these preparations of his, helping him with everything, suggesting various little improvements, remembering even he took pleasure in thinking, almost better than he did, how all the things had been. He was sorry those busy days were over—and that she would come no more. But the melancholy of this thought was tempered by the certainty that she must come to see Susie, that Susie being here he would have chances of seeing her continually more easily and sweetly than if he had been himself going to the rectory, where Percy for one was not very cordial. All this was going through his mind when he heard the outer door, an innocent village door which opened from outside, pushed open, and some

one enter. Then Percy's voice said, 'May I come in?' with a certain solemnity, John was chilled a little in the fulness of his satisfaction by Percy's voice.

'So you really got in, and got everything done in time,' said Percy, 'and has Miss Sandford come? It was clever of you to get it done in time. How you managed with the tradespeople, I don't know.'

'I was my own tradespeople,' said John, with a laugh. 'We have got the use of our hands, we engineers: and Elly,' he added, unguardedly, in the warmth of the moment, 'helped me so much: it is more credit to Elly than to me.'

Before John had ended this speech he had seen how injudicious it was, and accordingly the second time stammered a little and hesitated upon Elly's name.

'Really,' said Percy, with a darkening brow. And then he added, 'Sandford, I hope you won't take it amiss: but that was just what I wanted to speak to you about.'

'To speak to me about?' said John, with an air of astonishment: but as a matter of fact he was not surprised. He had been sure all the

time, even when most happy and at his ease, that this would come.

‘Yes: you know,’ said Percy. evidently not finding his errand an easy one, now he had plunged into it: ‘we were all children together, Jack.’

‘Yes, indeed. I am not likely to forget that; I shall have forgotten everything before I forget that,’ cried John.

‘And we’ve always been very good friends—I am sure not one of us wishes anything different—the best of friends.’

‘You have all been the best of friends to me,’ said John, with warmth, ‘up to this time I haven’t had much in my power: but if there should ever come a day——’ The earnestness with which he spoke made John’s eyes glisten. He felt his heart swell and glow with affection and every kindly feeling. And yet he knew very well that he was going to receive a blow.

‘No need to think of that,’ said Percy, with a little wave of his hand, ‘though indeed with the church and the gentry going down as they seem to be in these advancing times, and the people coming up——’

John was vaguely wounded by this. To be called of the people is not delightful to anyone who feels himself at all above the general crowd. Some visionaries may like it, but better in their own mouths than in those of others. Our young man was no democrat; and he felt himself a better man than Percy, notwithstanding his long coat.

‘You may be able to save all our lives one time or other. You may save us from the violence of the mob, like the French Revolution, don’t you know?’

‘I am not a Radical,’ said John. ‘I might require to be saved from the mob as well as you.’

‘Oh, not with the same reason,’ said the curate, with an air that was insufferable. John felt that presently he might be moved to pitch the friend of his youth out of window, notwithstanding Elly and notwithstanding the clerical coat. ‘Let us cling at least to the idea that you would save us. But, I say, look here—don’t you know——’

It had become very embarrassing indeed, and difficult to carry out, while John sat and looked at him seriously and attentively, not giving any assistance whatever.

‘Oh, I say,’ Percy repeated, ‘don’t you know? though we all think so highly of you, and wish you every success—oh, yes, we do, all of us, as much as anyone can. But, Jack, now don’t be offended. Just call your good sense to your aid, and you will see the reason in it. It is about Elly. Most likely you know beforehand what I want to say.’

‘No, not I,’ said John, all the meaning having arbitrarily disappeared from his face: and for a moment Percy, who was not so hard-hearted as he made himself appear, sat before him, a very awkward mortal, endeavouring to clear his throat and say what he had come to say.

In the midst of this, quite suddenly the door opened and a miracle happened, one of those that go on happening every day, and which will continue to happen to the end of time. It was a miracle, yet it was a very simple fact. The door opened, and light-footed in her slippers, which she had gone to get, and a pretty dress, which it had seemed to her expedient to put on at the same time, in honour of John and his new-old house, Susie suddenly appeared. She was twenty-six, but she looked much younger, she looked

any age that may be supposed the perfect age. Her pretty complexion was as sweet and fresh as eighteen ; but in her eyes there was something more, a sweetness of understanding and gentle thought to which eighteen rarely attains. Her fair hair was not so carefully arranged as usual, and frisked a little about her temples. She came in with that air of perfect health, perfect content and harmony, which made her very appearance in the hospital so healing and tranquillising, her eyes very clear and kind, always with a smile latent in them, even when her mouth was grave. She came in with the air of having something to say, something that was upon her lips, but made an instant's pause at the unexpected sight of a stranger whom she had never seen before.

That stranger, all embarrassed, startled beyond measure, feeling as if an angel had suddenly come in to recall him to a sense of the unfriendliness, the untenderness of what he was doing, gasped and rose from his chair and stood before her, in every line of his person and every feature of his face submissively asking pardon, though he could not understand how, and she had not

the slightest idea why. Had Susie been indeed that angel passing by, coming in to ask what unseemly words were these that were about to be said, the young man could not have been more confounded. He stood for a moment like a culprit at the bar, while she paused with a slightly startled look, which brought just a little colour, and then a smile.

‘I beg your pardon,’ she said. ‘I thought there was no one here.’ And ‘I beg your pardon,’ cried he, with far more emphasis and meaning. There was indeed so much emphasis in it that Susie’s smile ran into a little laugh, and she said to her brother: ‘Shall I go away?’

‘No,’ said John, putting a chair for her. He was a little stern, thinking still of the words that had not been said.

‘Jack,’ said Percy, ‘won’t you introduce me to your sister?’ There was nothing but humility and submission in his tone, a change which was almost ludicrous in its completeness. But he had the clerical habit of explaining himself, of making amiable advances, which stood him in stead in the present emergency. ‘I am one of

his oldest friends,' he said, 'and I hope you've heard of me, Miss Sandford. I'm Percy. If Jack hasn't been a traitor to the old days, I make bold to believe that you must have heard of me.'

'I have heard of you, often,' said Susie, a little puzzled. She perceived now that the conversation which she had interrupted had not been of so affectionate a kind as might have been inferred from this address; and she felt that the character of it had been entirely changed by her appearance—a suggestion which was not unpleasant. 'I have heard so much of everything at Edgeley,' she continued, 'that I feel as if, though I have never been here before, I was coming home.'

'I hope,' said Percy, 'that we shall succeed in strengthening the impression. I am very sure we shall try our best.' And with that he sat down again with all the mild persistence of his profession, as if he meant to remain there for the rest of his life.

CHAPTER XIII.

A NEW INFLUENCE.

‘PERCY, did you talk to John?’

‘Oh, yes. I talked to him a great deal,’ said Percy, without meeting his aunt’s anxious eye.

‘But about the one subject? About——’

‘Most subjects in earth and heaven.’ He paused a little, and then resumed with embarrassment. ‘If you mean about Elly, Aunt Mary—I—I didn’t. That’s the fact. His sister was there, and——somehow it didn’t seem suitable,’ the young man said.

‘Of course his sister was there. You knew she was expected: and of course you could not speak before her: but surely there were opportunities.’

‘I suppose so,’ said Percy, ‘but I didn’t, that is all that can be said.’

‘Your courage failed you at the last? Well, I don’t wonder: indeed I like you better for it,’ said Mrs. Egerton. ‘I did you injustice, my dear boy. I thought you rather liked the commission. That just proves how wrong we are in forming hasty judgments.’ Percy accepted this conclusion without wincing, and, after a moment of reflection, his aunt added, ‘I am afraid it will have to be done, though, and who is to do it? Your father is no good, and, as for me, I cannot trust myself. I wonder if Mr. Cattley—but then Mr. Cattley is very fond of Jack.’

‘He is much fonder of you, Aunt Mary.’

‘Don’t put it in that ridiculous way. He has a very strong friendship for me. Poor Mr. Cattley! I am very glad he is going: and yet if I were to ask him to do such a thing——’

‘Of course he would do it. He has always done everything you told him.’

‘You always go so much too far in everything, you boys. I am sure he would try to do it, but it would be very hard upon him. Percy, don’t you think you might get up your courage for another time?’

‘It isn’t the courage,’ he said. And then

after a moment :—‘ After all, what’s the use ? He’s not going to stay here all his life, and nothing can happen in a fortnight or so. Can’t you let it swing ?’

‘ Nothing can happen in a fortnight or so ! Why, it is just the time in which everything may happen. If he were settled here it would not be half so dangerous, there would seem no hurry then : whereas in a fortnight ! we may have Elly engaged to him before we know where we are.’

‘ Come now, Aunt Mary. Poor Jack is nobody : that is not his fault : but he’s an honourable fellow, nobody can say anything against his honour. He couldn’t behave in an ungentlemanly way.’

‘ What has that to do with it ?’ said Mrs. Egerton, exasperated. ‘ Honourable ! why, in ten years, with a good profession and getting on so well, he may be a great match.’

‘ Then why, in the name of heaven—— Oh, I’m speaking from your point of view. To me it would be horrid, anyhow—that fellow !—but if you think so——’

‘ I don’t want Elly to wait ten years,’ said

Mrs. Egerton. 'The longer a girl like Elly waits, the more fastidious she grows. If she does not marry till thirty, she will probably never marry at all.'

'She will probably not have the chance,' Percy remarked.

'That is all you know. You are all brutal on that question, you men. As if to have a chance was all that was necessary, and every woman was on the watch to obtain such an honour and glory.' Having freed her mind in this way, Mrs. Egerton resumed:—'What is the sister like? Is she common? Is she of the hospital-nurse or of the shop-girl type? Does he seem fond of her? Her appearance might do Elly good, perhaps.'

'Shop-girl!' said Percy to himself. He grew pale with a sort of holy horror. 'You women are dreadful,' he said. 'Talk of being brutal! I don't know any angels myself, but I should think she would be more like that type.'

'Indeed!' Mrs. Egerton said, and stopped and stared at him, a proceeding of which Percy showed his dislike by turning, if not his back, which would have been uncivil, at least the

side of his clerical coat, and shaven cheek, to his relation's eye. This made the gaze of scrutiny which she directed towards him innocuous, but raised her suspicions all the more. 'Dear me,' she said, 'this is a sudden enthusiasm. I was not at all prepared for it. The mother was a striking-looking woman. What do you take for the angelic type, Percy, if I may ask?'

'The type of Miss Sandford,' said Percy: 'I don't mean anything silly.' He spoke with an impatience which was not unhabitual, for Percy was one of those who think it the fault of the other people when he is not immediately understood. 'You had better go and see her for yourself—indeed, good manners demand that you should do so, and show yourself civil, you and Elly too.'

Mrs. Egerton looked at him for a moment, not sure whether she ought to be angry: but policy and good humour won the day, and she laughed.

'You lay down my duty for me very distinctly,' she said. 'You forget that my manners were formed before you were born. But I shall certainly go and see Miss Sandford—'

brought up among sick people and in hospital duties as she has been, a little change must be important for her.'

Women perhaps have the gift of showing a muffled claw like this better than men. Percy was exasperated to have the stranger spoken of as a hospital nurse, but he had not an opening to say a word.

'Poor thing,' Mrs. Egerton added, 'it must be a trying life. I daresay the mere sight of people who have nothing the matter with them will do her good. Certainly I shall go. Oh, Mr. Cattley,' said she, as the curate opened the door, 'you have just come in time. I gave Percy a commission last night which he has not been able to carry out. Perhaps I might ask you——'

'You know,' said Mr. Cattley, 'that what you wish is a law to me.'

'Not that,' she said, with a faint, rising colour, 'but this is a very delicate matter, out of the ordinary. It is to prevent further unhappiness: it is for the real good of two young creatures, who are almost as dear to you, I believe, as they are to me.'

‘What is it?’ he said. Mr. Cattley was a little grey by nature, with no perceptible colour, but he warmed slightly with the interest of this mysterious office which was about to be conferred upon him.

‘It is about John and Elly,’ Mrs. Egerton said.

‘What,’ cried the curate, ‘have they——?’ with a gleam of animation, which faded, however, when he saw that his oracle shook her head; but it was very evident which way Mr. Cattley’s sympathies went.

‘I don’t know if I can trust you, after all. Mr. Cattley, you know Jack—though he is a charming boy, and was almost like one of ourselves as long as he was living here—still he is not in the same position, is he? Not perhaps quite so well educated and all that—not—a gentleman, as people say.’

‘Yes, I am sure he is a gentleman,’ said Mr. Cattley, quietly.

‘In heart and in manners, oh, yes. He is very nice; he is full of good impulses, and his manners, for his position, are very nice. But, Mr. Cattley, there is something more—really,

you must acknowledge something more is necessary.'

'For what?' he said.

At this Mrs. Egerton's middle-aged countenance was touched with a little colour, for perhaps in consequence of the curate's boundless admiration for her, she stood a little in awe of him, and doubtless avoided in his presence the expression of all sentiments that might seem to him unworthy. She hesitated for a moment.

'Mr. Cattley,' she said. 'I must first explain. These two are at a dangerous age to be such great friends. With boy and girl that sort of sentiment is so apt to glide into—a warmer feeling.'

'Yes, I know; and not only with boy and girl.'

'Well, some people condemn all friendship between men and women on that account; but of course at their age it is doubly—— Now, Mr. Cattley, you understand. With the greatest regard for John Sandford, one would not, you know, wish that Elly—— Her father would never give his consent.'

‘I see,’ said the curate. ‘It would not be a very fine match for her, indeed. I should prefer a young duke.’

‘Don’t laugh at me. I should not prefer a young duke: but I should prefer some one a little above, to some one a little below. Don’t you see? I think in the present circumstances you must feel there is something reasonable in that.’

‘Quite reasonable,’ said Mr. Cattley. ‘I should like Elly to be rich and great—happy, too.’

‘Yes, yes; there is no question of her happiness. If that were involved, of course I should not say another word. But at present we have not to take that into consideration. The only danger is that both of them might get to think—they are full of poetry and stories, Elly as full as possible. They might get to think they were made for each other, without any sufficient cause even in themselves, and everything against it—everything! in the circumstances.’

‘I see,’ Mr. Cattley said again. ‘But what do you suppose I can do?’

‘If you would but speak to Jack! There is no one he respects so much. Warn him that

it is not wise for him to see so much of Elly, that their old familiarity was only possible when they were children, that for him to call her—as he does—I am sure you would know exactly what to say. Percy was to have done it last night: but he was entirely routed by the appearance of Jack's sister whom he took for——' Mrs. Egerton laughed, but continued with mingled prudence and temerity, for Percy looked daggers at her, 'who seems to have been something in the guardian angel way.'

Mr. Cattley did not take any notice of this, but he said, meditatively,

'It will be a curious thing for me to do. And yet perhaps I am the most natural agent. But I don't know what I shall say to him. It may be—have you considered that?—putting an idea into his head which was not there.'

'Oh, I fear the idea is in his head,' said Mrs. Egerton. '*That* idea never fails to get into their heads. If it was an arrangement everybody approved, and that we were moving heaven and earth to bring about, then indeed—but the moment it becomes undesirable, a trouble, an annoyance! I am sure when you

see him, that you will easily find what it is best to say. And I shall be so grateful,' she cried, giving him an affectionate glance, 'for, Mr. Cattley, I know you will be very considerate; you will say nothing to wound his feelings.'

'Nothing more than is necessary. You don't suppose things like this can be said without hurting the feelings,' said the curate. 'Poor boy,' he added, after a moment, 'I would do a great deal to get him his wishes. It seems hard that I should be the one to say he's not to have them.'

'But you approve? You see there is nothing else to be done: you agree with me that it would be impossible to let it go on? I am sure, whoever else may misconceive my meaning, you understand,' Mrs. Egerton said, with a sudden little pressure of her hand upon his arm.

He looked at her with a kind of appeal in his eyes.

'I think I understand,' he said, 'and I approve, too, in a kind of way. But you will be kind? You will not push it too far?'

'I hope I am not unkind,' Mrs. Egerton said.

Thus it was that Mr. Cattley went, in the

afternoon of the day following Susie's arrival, to the old house of the Sandfords. He went somewhat against the grain ; but yet there was sufficient justice in the commission given him. He thought with a little sigh how entirely natural and appropriate it would be that John should love Elly, and Elly John. If it was so, they would be delivered at once, in the happiness and harmony of nature, from all the constraints which distracted life. He himself had loved, if he had ever ventured to think so, amiss. He had given his affections to a woman entirely out of his sphere, of a different development, almost of a different generation. Any idea of marrying her, of a house made bright by her love, had never been possible. Many moments of a happiness very sweet, though always subdued, he had no doubt possessed. She had been if impossible as a wife, yet his dearest friend, his frequent companion, and his years had passed very sweetly by her side. But if it had chanced to him in his youth, like John, to love somebody of his own age, somebody within his reach ! If *she* had been young, like Elly, and fancy-free when he was as John !

He sighed to think how many embarrassments, how many self-denials those two young creatures would escape in the love which had no complications in it. And then he recollected, with a shock, that he was going to put a stop to this love, that he was going as the accepted messenger of family pride and importance, of the difference between the rector's daughter and an obscure young man whose pedigree would not bear examination. Mr. Cattley shook his head a little and rubbed his eyes; was it possible that this was the errand upon which he was going? He then began to think of the matter from the other point of view. It was indeed very natural that it should be thought undesirable for Elly, who might, as people say, marry anybody, to have her affections surprised before she knew anything of the world, or had seen anyone, by a young man of obscure origin and uncertain prospects. They were quite justified in thinking so, quite right, indeed, and in trying to save her from a connection which was almost too natural, into which she might be drawn by the mere force of circumstances, by the habit of liking John, and the impossibility of

understanding the difference between liking and love. Yes, he said to himself, Elly must be saved. She must not be drawn inadvertently into a union which was too natural, which seemed inevitable, the expedient of a story. No, no! Elly, and John, too, must be saved from drifting into that.

He carried on this controversy, which was not really a controversy, for his heart first took one side and then the other, and he was the partisan of both, as he went down the street, mechanically returning all the salutations made to him. He said to himself that it was a strange world, that wherever one turned there was trouble, things not going right in the battle of life, all for want of being put in the right way at the beginning. His sense of all these contradictions was possibly deepened by the consciousness which never left him that he was going away. He was to leave all these people whom he knew, and whose troubles he understood, and to leave the way of life to which he had become accustomed, and the sweetness of the friendship which was his, that sweetness in his life which replaced the wife and children of other men. Mr. Cattley's heart rebelled a little in spite of

himself. Why had he to go away? Not by his own wish entirely. He would have gone on for ever if they would let him, and nobody would have been the worse. He was going away to better himself, so they all said, because at his age it was right he should be independent and have a living of his own and settle down.

Settle down! How was he ever to settle down? He thought drearily of the new rectory in which he had already spent a dreary month or two. And now he had come back to initiate Percy into his duties, and to take leave of all he was most used to, and cared for most. John! That he should have to interfere with Jack,—to whom everything was possible,—he, in his middle-aged desolation! What should he himself do? The worst thing would be if he were ever forced by stress of circumstances to marry some innocent woman who might be put in his way, and do her grievous wrong, marrying for convenience because it would not be possible for him to live alone. It was John who ought to interfere, who should take his old tutor by the shoulders and say to him—What do you mean by it? What right have you to yield to

external pressure in this way and tear yourself from all you care for in life? If the tables were turned on him, either by John or Elly, Mr. Cattley felt it would be only just : but nevertheless, holding to his *consigne* to the last moment, he went on—to do her bidding dutifully, and her business, and make an end of any dream that might be stealing into John's imagination. Poor John !

Mr. Cattley walked into the parlour which he knew so well, and where he could not help feeling the old people must be sitting, waiting to upbraid him, for conspiring—he who had always professed to be so proud of the boy—against Jack's happiness. He did not pay any attention to what the maid said in answer to his inquiry for Mr. Sandford, but went in straight, as he had been accustomed to do, without announcement or preliminary. And then there occurred to Mr. Cattley something of the same miraculous effect which on the evening before had paralysed Percy. There rose up as he entered, meeting him with the honest, modest look of a pair of eyes sincere and sweet, and that tranquil air of home-dwelling and content which makes an

ordinary room into a sort of palace of the soul—Susie, not John. He looked at her in great surprise : for, though he knew that John's sister had come, he had not realised nor thought of her, and for the first moment did not even comprehend that this was she.

‘My brother is out,’ said Susie. ‘If you will sit down, I am sure he will not be long. He has gone up to the rectory, I think, with some books.’

‘To the rectory?’ said Mr. Cattley, with a prevision, which—for the reason that it agreed with all his wishes, yet went against all his instructions—made his heart beat—‘I must have met him on the way had he gone there.’

‘I am sure he has gone there,’ said Susie, ‘for he took some books Miss Spencer had asked for. He may have gone round some other way.’

‘Yes, he may have gone round,’ said Mr. Cattley, his face growing long, yet his heart stirring with a sharp, acute sympathy which was almost painful. And then he said, ‘You must pardon me, Miss Sandford, for I am sure I am speaking to Jack's sister. I should like to wait for him if you will let me stay.’

‘Surely,’ she said, with that smile in her eyes which was always there, resuming her seat : and the curate sat down by her, with a pleasure in this novelty, in the old associations turned into new ones, in the unknown gentle friend who did not know anything about his perplexities or his position, but met him on fresh ground with her pleasant welcoming eyes and tranquillising presence. He would wait for Jack : and probably some new light as to how to treat this matter might spring up by the way.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE VITA NUOVA.

JOHN had gone out for no particular reason. He had nothing to do, which was unusual to him, and his mind was perturbed and restless. He was altogether out of *son assiette*, as the French say, out of his natural atmosphere, exposed to thoughts, temptations of all kinds, with which naturally he had nothing to do. A holiday is not always so very good a thing. When the mind is busy with a delicate piece of engineering, or with specifications or even estimates, it has not time to get into mischief. But fancy when suddenly left blank of all those occupations, deprived of all preservatives, and left to face the most supreme of youthful impulses without any defence at all, is in a bad way. John did what of course is the very worst thing

he could possibly have done. He wandered about all day, taking long walks, and turning over and over in his bewildered brain the same subject—and that subject was Elly. What else? the only thing that he ought not to have thought about.

He should not have done so—that was too certain. When he felt it coming on, when she jumped into his mind like that, without rhyme or reason, he ought to have shut the door sternly against her, he ought to have betaken himself to some matter of professional difficulty of the hardest possible sort; he should have devoted himself to the Euphrates Canal or the St. Gothard Tunnel. Or if he had wanted something nearer home there was the great subject which had already occupied him for years, and which we may call the drainage of the Thames valley—which is a thing waiting to be done, and by which some engineer, and perhaps John, might yet distinguish himself. He was aware that he ought to do this, but he did not. Instead of engaging in a course of thought which would have been both laudable and useful, he thought of Elly and nothing else—nothing

but Elly, as he walked for hours across the common and to every village in the neighbourhood. Susie, who had not fathomed his difficulties, thought these long walks very good for him. She could not herself walk so far, but she had always heard that exercise was the first necessity for a man, so that, instead of opposing, as she ought to have done, she encouraged him for the good of his health, and because his holidays would soon be over, to walk and think—of Elly—though she did not know anything of this latter exercise.

Percy's interrupted remonstrances of the previous night, which he had understood well enough, as he had foreseen all the time that they were coming, quickened to an almost incalculable extent the current of John's thoughts. It gave them a swing and energy which they had never had before. He had known very well it was coming! From the beginning he had been aware that things could not go on on this present footing, that some change there must be; he had foreseen it dimly when Percy said 'my sister,' that the familiar name, the child's name, might not be given over to John's lips.

How well he had perceived that ! He had even, as he now remembered, made an effort to obey. He had tried to set things straight, to call her Miss Spencer, to treat the old childish intimacy as a thing of the past, if Elly would have allowed it to be so. But she had not allowed it ; she would not suffer it ; and now ? What was to be done ? for something would have to be done. Even if there were no Percy in the world, no watchful aunt, all this would have to be altered somehow. The course of their history could not go on as it was going now. His thoughts quickened as he pushed on and on for many a flying mile. He walked, not seeing where he went, the landscape spinning past him as if he were travelling in an express train. Things could not go on as they were going now. Either all this whirling world of passion and excitement must go back and be stilled and relapse into the former calm, the easy boy and girl friendship, that relation which was entirely of the past : or else—what else ? What was the alternative ? There was an alternative ; but even to himself it was difficult to put it into words.

This was what passed while Susie thought

that he was taking exercise for his health and to take advantage of being in the country. When he came in he brought the scent of the fresh air with him, and a glow as of vigour and wholesome exertion on his face, the rapidity of his movements, and the contact of the keen, sweet air keeping him from all appearance of being sicklied o'er with thought—though no philosopher could have thought more deeply or sought more diligently a solution of any problem. This was how he had been engaged on the day when Mr. Cattley came to set matters right. He had, indeed, taken with him the books which Elly wanted, which he had to carry to the rectory for her, but he carried them first for miles along the country roads, always busy with that problem which he had to solve; and in all likelihood would have left them at the rectory as he returned home without so much as a glimpse of Elly. For, as a matter of fact, at the time when her relatives were most alarmed, and when the course of events seemed to be most whirling and rapid, John had seen less and less of Elly. They had both taken fright at the same moment—a mutual terror had seized upon

them ; they had begun to avoid instead of seeking each other—he walking miles about on his way to the rectory to leave those books for her, she restricting herself to the most limited circuit that she might not encounter him.

Mrs. Egerton was seated in her room, which commanded the gate of the rectory, and in fact of the village street, waiting for Mr. Cattley to come back, and tell her how he had sped ; and Mr. Cattley in John Sandford's house was sitting with a sort of vague solace and consolation in the company of the gentle young woman who knew nothing about him, except that he was her brother's friend, waiting for John. The afternoon was a little heavy, as afternoons in the summer often are. It had been raining all the morning, and the air was warm and damp, and the atmosphere oppressive. Elly, who had spent the day chiefly at home, taking her walk round and round the garden, lingering for a long time under the old pear-tree, had been seized at last by one of those fits of impatience which so often come upon us in a moment, nullifying the precautions of many days. She felt as if there was no air, and that a run

across the common to the cottage of one of her pensioners would deliver her from the stifling of this oppressed and breathless state. She knew a way amongst the gorse, a wild little track over the moor and heather, which nobody but herself and the village children ever used. And she would not, she said to herself, be half-an-hour gone. She seized upon her little basket, which stood on the hall table, all nicely packed with certain little matters which made her a welcome visitor ; and so went out, nobody seeing her, if anybody had thought of remarking. But, indeed, it was not for Elly, but Mr. Cattley that Mrs. Egerton was on the watch, and no one else took any notice of the goings and comings of the daughter of the house. She skimmed along as light as a bird, until she got among the gorse bushes, half ablaze with their yellow blossoms, filling the numerous bees with a sweet intoxication and the air with a honeyed balm ; and there Elly lingered, her basket hanging from her hand, her head drooping, her mind full of thought, which was half troublous and half sweet. She felt the crisis, too, in every vein, but not as

John felt it. The fears, the tribulations, the doubts of that moment were not for her. Her honour could never be called in question. No one could think of her as having betrayed any trust placed in her. Her brain was thrilling with a suppressed excitement and wonder as to the next step in this wonderful little drama of which she was the heroine. And she was aware that there would be blame: she was aware that there would be a struggle; but she was in no ways afraid of either one or the other. The commotion of the great new thing, the revolution which seemed to be imminent, the mingled reluctance and eagerness, the hesitation and the longing, made disturbance enough in her girlish breast.

The mossy undergrowth, so luxurious and soft, was wet with the morning's rain, and yielded in all its velvet inequalities and cushions of brilliant verdure, to her feet, which made no sound. Neither did that of the other, who was threading the same maze, coming towards her with the books under his arm, making his way ten miles round to the rectory, unconscious how near he was to the object of his thoughts.

When they came suddenly in sight of each other round the great headland of the furze bush, one of the giants of the common, all keen prickles and honey flowers, Elly nearly dropped her basket and John let fall his books. He had to stoop to gather them up as he took off his hat: but before even this their looks had leaped to each other and met and made all clear—the fright, the panic, the heavenly content and delight flashed from one to the other. What more could words say? And then, when the books were collected and the basket held fast, there was a pause.

‘I didn’t know you would be passing here,’ said Elly, with an unconscious excuse to herself, as if something within had suddenly accused her of coming on purpose to meet one who—was it not so?—she was a little anxious to avoid.

‘No—and I didn’t mean it,’ said John. He added, after a moment, ‘I think it must be fate.’

‘What must be fate? I am going to Betty Mirfield’s cottage, where I go always every week.’

‘I know,’ said John, humbly; ‘you are al-

ways going about doing good, whereas I never think of anyone but myself.'

This gave Elly strength to laugh, which she had been too much agitated (which was so ridiculous!) to be capable of before. 'If you call it doing good to take old Betty her tea and sugar! You never used to call things by such fine names.'

'I never understood what anything meant in those old days,' said John, with an air of preternatural seriousness. As a matter of fact, he was in such a condition of emotion and excitement that he could scarcely speak.

'Oh, Jack! How can you say such things? I think you understood far better than you do now. You look almost,' said Elly, giving him a succession of furtive glances, 'as if you were—afraid—of me. How can you be afraid—of me? or make fine speeches about doing good and that, Jack, to me!'

'Elly,' he said all at once, very tremulously, 'I am dreadfully unhappy: if I seem strange that is the cause.'

'Unhappy!' she exclaimed, with a little cry of distress. 'Oh, Jack, why? Tell me!' And

throwing down her basket she caught his arm with her hands, and looked up anxiously into his face, her eyes all set in curves and puckers of sympathy and disquietude. She forgot even for the moment all the heart-breakings of this critical moment and thought only what could be the matter. What could she do to comfort him? Unhappy was a word of dreadful meaning to Elly's ear.

The books tumbled once more out of John's hold: they lay upon the mossy grass amicably in company with the overturned basket, where old Betty's little packets of tea and sugar peeped out as if to inquire what was the cause of all this commotion. John stooped over the hands that had caught his arm, putting down his head upon them. His heart was going like one of the clanging engines with which he was so familiar. He half forgot that Elly was the cause, in the necessity he felt to tell her of his trouble, and be comforted by her sympathy. And they were so close that Elly felt the vibration in him and was half frightened by it, yet anxious only to soothe him.

‘Oh, what is it? Tell me, tell me!’ she said.

‘Elly, do you remember what I said to you the first day? It is all changed between us, though you thought it need not be. I felt it then, the first day. I had no right—— Do they think I don’t know that as well as they do? I have no right. And yet I can’t give you up, and go away, and hear of you marrying some one else, and having nothing more to do with me. It’s not possible, it’s not possible!—I can’t, Elly, let you go and give you up, and be nothing more to you, nor you to me. Elly! don’t say you want me to do that.’

He was half leaning his weight upon her, quite unconsciously making her slight figure sway and tremble.

‘Jack,’ she said, her voice trembling too. ‘Is there nothing else that makes you unhappy but only about you and me?’

‘Isn’t that enough?’ he said, with something of the petulance of passionate feeling, raising his head to look her indignantly in her face.

‘Enough for trouble,’ said Elly, shaking her head; ‘but unhappy is a dreadful word.’

‘Not so dreadful,’ said he, looking at her, not as if she were the arbiter of fate, but with that

intense desire for her sympathy which seemed now his first feeling. 'Not half so dreadful as if I have to give up and go away?'

'And who is there,' said Elly, on her side, with a little glow of indignation too, 'that can make you give up and go away?'

Then they stood for a moment and looked at each other, far too much in earnest and too serious to think of confusion, or blushes, or any of the commonplaces of love-making. At last he said, taking her hands,

'No one, Elly, if you don't——'

'You know,' she said, still indignantly, 'that I shan't. Why should you give up and go away?'

'Because I am not good enough for you, Elly. That's all quite true, not half good enough.'

'Of course,' she said, 'you have not any money, Jack. But what does that matter? You will have some, some day. We can wait. That is nothing to be unhappy about, anyhow.'

'There is to me, and there is to them. I'd like you to have everything, Elly; do you think I could live to bring you to poverty? It wrings my heart to think of it; that you, who are a lady

born, and are too good for a prince, should come to poverty through me.'

'Jack,' said Elly, in that mature and elder-sisterly way with which she had always taken the charge of him; 'if you can't bear to leave me and go away, and yet can't bear to keep me and bring me to poverty, what is to be done? You will have to bear either one or the other, so far as I can see.'

It was not perhaps the right moment to laugh: but it is difficult to regulate that sense of the ridiculous, which is one comfort in all our troubles. Something in the sight of John's solemn face, so troubled and serious in the clutch of this dilemma, overcame Elly in her nervous excitement and she burst into a wild peal of laughter—which rang over all the damp, sweet wilderness that had become the Garden of Eden of this primitive natural pair.

By-and-by, they gathered up the basket and the books, and took the tea and sugar to Betty Mirfield, who had been grumbling that Miss Elly was so late, and did not hesitate to tell her so. And then they went back again, lingering across

the common, winding their devious way among the great furze-bushes which caught at them as they passed with prickles that left marks of dew and a breath of honey ; and so very slowly walked back again to Edgeley, the rectory and the world, from which heaven knows they had gone far enough afield. They had of course a thousand things to say, a thousand, and a thousand more ; and lost themselves in that fairy-land which by times is near to all of us at every age, but nearest of all at the age of Elly and John. But when no further delay was possible, the sun sinking in the skies, signs of home-going and evening rest penetrating even to their charmed senses, they reached at last the edge of the common, and saw before them the everyday existence which they had forgotten, they both awoke from their dream, and standing still for one awful moment looked each other in the face. Oh, it was all easy enough between themselves, delightfully 'easy, needing no troublous explanations, the very course of nature. But beyond that enchanted common, and the gorse bushes with their prickles ! They stood and faltered, and Elly, who had been the

bravest, felt now for the first time her heart sink to her shoes. John's face set into that sternness which belongs to a forlorn hope. He caught Elly's hand and drew it through his arm.

‘We must be honest, whatever else,’ he said.
‘Come and let us have it out at once.’

‘Oh, Jack!’ cried the other culprit. They were no longer the enchanted prince and princess. Aunt Mary's face, severe as fate already, shone terrible upon them from the window, and there was no escape.

CHAPTER XV.

A FAMILY CONCLAVE.

‘NEVER, never, never!’ cried Mrs. Egerton. She was red with excitement and wrath. Her matronly presence, generally so dignified and friendly and calm, grew into that of an angry Juno, swelling and expanding in indignation and resentment till the passion seemed to fill the room. And this all the more that no one shared, or at least appeared to share, her agitation. John stood before her humble enough, red too, with pain and mortification, yet not giving way; a culprit, but defending himself. Elly stood at the back of her aunt’s chair, astonished, not sufficiently recovered from her surprise at her reception to have yet taken her part in the controversy. The two other persons present were Percy and Mr. Cattley, who had both

been there when the lovers, in the flush of their first happiness and pain, with all the solemnity the occasion demanded, came in to make their confession. Percy, at least, it might be supposed, would have been on his aunt's side : but, instead of standing by her as he ought, he had turned his back upon her and stood gazing out of the window at nothing, with a degree of trouble and embarrassment in every line of that back which would have awakened a thousand apprehensions in the bosom of Aunt Mary, had she at that moment had any eyes for him, or been aware of anything except the demand just made upon her, which had carried her altogether out of herself.

Mr. Cattley sat near her, with his eyes cast down and a very serious face, twiddling his thumbs with great gravity. It is not to be supposed that intimate as he was, and having been so long a constant visitor at the rectory, he had not seen Mrs. Egerton angry before. But it was a sight he did not like, and especially the present cause of her anger was distressful to him. He had just come from Susie, and the atmosphere of peace which was around her,

and he was fond of John, and his heart rebelled against this summary denial of a young love, which was a thing he respected from the bottom of his heart.

‘Never, never, never!’ cried Mrs. Egerton, ‘how can you ask it? How could you ever think—you, a boy I have always been so kind to—Too kind! I have made you like one of our own boys. And now you come and ask me for—— Who are you, John Sandford? What does anyone know about you or your family? No, I am not saying a word against his grandparents. They were dear old people and I was very fond of them, but not, not—— And they would have been as indignant as I am. What! John, their boy, to put himself on the same level, and think—actually think—that he would be accepted by the rector’s daughter! Oh, Jack! I never expected anything of the kind from you.’

‘I feel all that,’ said John, ‘I know it all. What you say is quite true.’

‘It is a fine thing to say that—when you come and do it all the same. Who are you, to propose for Elly? What do we know about you, or your means, or your family.’

Upon this Elly started from the shelter of Mrs. Egerton's chair.

'His family!' she said, as all girls do in the same circumstances. 'We know himself: and that is of more consequence than all the families in the world.'

'I say, Elly, shut up,' said her brother, turning half round.

Mrs. Egerton turned to him who offered this succour with eagerness.

'Percy understands,' she said, 'he has more interest in it than anyone except myself, and he knows the world and that such things can't be. They can't be. Ask anybody. Ask your own connections, Jack; ask——Mr. Cattley.' She made a little pause before she said this, and gave a glance at the curate seated there with downcast eyes. Her voice faltered a little, but not with trouble this time. It was a sort of half smile which fluttered across the current of her speech. 'He is romantic,' she said, 'but even he will tell you such connections can't be.'

'I will not shut up,' said Elly, 'I am the person most interested. If you send Jack away, if he is such a fool,'—something in the freedom

of sisterhood was still in her feelings towards her lover. 'If you get the better of him, if you bully him or over-persuade him to go away, who is it that will suffer? Not you, Aunt Mary, nor Percy, nor anybody but me. Jack and I have always been the two who stood together,' cried the girl, the tears glistening in her eyes like dew under sunshine. 'You know, Mr. Cattley! The others went away, they fell into their mannish, stupid Oxford ways, but Jack and I have always stood fast. Jack! if you let them master you, if you let them send you away——'

She raised her hand, clenched into a small, rosy, but not unpowerful fist, threatening fate in general, and the evil ways of the world. Love had only come, in Elly's mind, to strengthen the partnership, the comradeship that existed before. If he could be driven to desert her, if he could be such a fool! She could not help taking the tone still of the one girl among these boys, the girl whose standard of what was right and true was more absolute than theirs—less modified by possibility or circumstance—and who flamed with instant wrath upon any who would betray or fall away from that uncompromising rule.

‘My dear Elly,’ said Mr. Cattley, ‘that’s a very different matter. That was when you were at school.’

‘To be sure,’ said Mrs. Egerton : ‘and Jack was a boy who might have been anyone’s companion. Oh, so he is now, do you think I doubt that? But, when boys and girls grow up, other questions come in. You can only marry in your own class. It is no rule of mine : it is a settled principle. Nothing but trouble ever comes of it when you marry out of your own sphere.’

John had borne all the discussion well. He had stood firmly enough, not shrinking, while he was torn to pieces and defended and defied. Now he spoke.

‘Perhaps I am wrong,’ he said, ‘but all that one reads and sees seems to show that for a settled principle that’s not so strong as it once was. If a man is well off, people make a difference.’

‘If you mean to say that I am thinking of a mercenary marriage for Elly——’ said Mrs. Egerton.

John took no notice of this interruption. He went on with what he was saying.

‘Now, I mean to be well off,’ he said. ‘I am doing well already, and I mean to get on. What does it matter what my grandfather was, if I am able to live as gentlemen do, and to think as gentlemen do, and to maintain—those who belong to me.’ He would not say ‘my wife—’ but he held his head high, as if with the pride of having done so, and looked at Elly; and one quick, bright flash of happiness and consciousness went over both faces at the same moment. ‘I am only an engineer,’ he said, ‘but it’s a fine profession, and when one succeeds one grows rich. And I mean to succeed. My grandfather was not one to be ashamed of, whatever he was. And if it is said that I’m not a gentleman,’ said John, with another darker flush of self-assertion, ‘it’s an insult to Mr. Cattley, and even to this house where I have been allowed to come, and where such an idea was never hinted at before.’

‘Oh, Jack!’ cried Mrs. Egerton horrified, clasping her hands in deprecation. ‘I never said that. I never thought it. It is only that you are not in the same sphere.’

‘Would you say so if I were at the head of

my firm?' said John, 'if I were making thousands a year; if I had works going on all over the world? I shall be if you will give me time. Would you say then that I was not of the same sphere?'

'Yes,' said Elly, quick as lightning, taking the words with fine scorn out of her aunt's mouth; 'for, of course, it would not be likely then that you would come to a poor little village to ask for a country girl like me.'

Percy had been standing all this time with his back to the belligerents, looking fixedly out of the window. His back was as uncertain and embarrassed a back as ever man had. It gave his aunt no support at all. There was something in the aspect of his shoulders shrugged up to his ears, and his elbows sunk with the plunging of his hands into his pockets, that took all courage out of her. Percy, who had been so much more strenuous on this question than Aunt Mary herself, who had undertaken to speak to John! And now, here he stood, taking no notice, gazing out of the window! When it came to this point, however, he turned round, not looking at anyone, his eyebrows pulled down over his eyes.

‘I say,’ he remarked, slowly, ‘what is the good of all this now? It’s gone too far to be stopped like this. You should have made an end of it long ago. I warned you when he came first. You had no call to have him here. It was folly to begin with, and it’s nonsense now. You wouldn’t let him marry Elly if he could, and he couldn’t if you did let him. What’s the good of going on? It’s all true that both of you say. If he was rich enough you’d have him like a shot. But you can’t have him now, and he knows it, and so do we all. Why, even my father would make a stand. It’s a pity they’ve had this talk, but it can’t be helped now. The best thing for him to do is to go right away.’

‘Away!’ cried Elly and John in a breath, making a simultaneous step towards each other. Percy was the little one of the family. He was much shorter than John, and even than Elly, whose female garments and hair upon the top of her head gave her the advantage. He came drifting between them, still with his hands in his pockets.

‘I like good family and that sort of thing,’ said Percy, ‘but I never said it required that to

make a gentleman. Handsome is as handsome does. There are things a fellow can do, and things he can't do,' said this young man.

'I know what he means, Elly,' said John, 'and I believe he's right, though I never thought Percy would stand my friend. I'll go, Mrs. Egerton: he's right. I'll not even hold Elly to what she has said—(though I know the sky will fall before she'll desert me,' he exclaimed, in an aside). 'But I'll not say another word. I'll go.'

The ladies looked at him with a little gasp of surprise, Elly standing with her lips apart as if she had begun to speak and stopped herself, Mrs. Egerton drawing a sudden long breath. She was astonished by the sudden quick turn this youthful argument had taken. Percy, her champion, her inspirer even, had seemed to take the other side, and yet had routed the enemy. It was altogether amazing and incomprehensible, almost disappointing: for Mrs. Egerton had felt that John would take a great deal of arguing with, and she had some belief in her own powers. The scene was a curious one. Percy, standing between the two with his hands

in his pockets and his head down, looked more as if some wind had blown him there than as if he had been taking an active part in such a controversy. Mr. Cattley, still sitting passive near Mrs. Egerton's table, had now lifted his head and was looking on, while John, all firm and strong in his new resolution, had become the centre of the group.

'I thought I might have had a week more,' said John, with a touch of pathos which went to the hearts of both the ladies, 'after all these years! But I won't, Elly. I won't waste another moment. What do I want with holidays when there's you at the end? Mrs. Egerton, good-bye. You've been awfully kind to me. And I know you're right. I'm not a match for her. I'll never be good enough—but I'll be rich enough one day, please God.'

'John, you take away my breath. Why should you go off like this, like a flash of lightning?—and there's your sister just arrived. Dear me,' cried Mrs. Egerton, 'just give this nonsense up, it will be far more reasonable, and take your holiday out.'

'Must you go, Jack?' said Elly, quite subdued.

‘If it is only your sister that would detain you,’ said Mr. Cattley, clearing his throat. ‘She will find friends, I am sure. We shall all be glad to do our best for her, if she chooses to stay.’

‘Oh! we’ll look after that. We’ll see to Miss Sandford,’ Percy said. “

Mrs. Egerton’s under lip dropped with an almost awe of the miracle happening before her eyes. Mr. Cattley even, her own particular slave! She gave him a look and then turned to Percy: then went off suddenly into an unexpected and, as appeared, quite uncalled-for laugh.

‘Elly,’ she said, ‘the gentlemen are taking it all into their own hands——’

And she who had so much good-humoured, affectionate contempt for the gentlemen, who had followed her lead with such docility for many a day! She did not recover from her astonishment even when John shook hands with her hastily, and hurried off as if he meant to begin collecting those thousands this very day. She had not spirit enough even, save very feebly in a scarcely audible voice, to call back Elly, who hurried after him and who paid no attention to that faint call. She did nothing

but stare at the two curates as the sound of the quick young footsteps went downstairs and died away, and then became audible again, going out and through the garden, the gate swinging and clicking after them. Then she said, 'Elly has gone with him!' in an appeal and protest to earth and heaven.

'It can't be helped,' said Percy, with a wave of his hand.

Elly followed John out without saying a word, going after him quite solemnly : the colour had gone out of her face, her steps were subdued as if in subjection to his. No fear had been in Elly's mind. She had been accustomed to find most things yield to her, and she did not see in this new event so great an additional gravity that she should have been brought to a stop in her life, or made to contemplate the idea of failure. Even now she would have fallen back upon the supreme consciousness of her importance in the house, and her father's incapability of resisting anything she desired, had not that short but most conclusive colloquy between John and Percy confused all her ideas and silenced the words on her lips. Aunt Mary, it is true, was more

strenuous in her resistance, more determined than Elly had any idea of; but the girl, who knew the ways of her own race and kind, knew well that even Aunt Mary, after a great deal of impassioned argument, going over and over again every feature of the case, would end by exhausting everything against it, and coming round to the conviction that there was nothing so interesting in life as the young pair and their hopes, and that, however she might shake her head over it, her happiness was involved in Elly's. That was the strong point of which Elly was quite conscious. Her own happiness was a matter too important to the household to be permanently risked in any way.

But a few words from Percy, for whom she had no veneration, whom she rather scorned in his new sacerdotal assumptions, had changed all this! Elly was confused by the suddenness of the revolution, and did not understand it, nor did she quite understand the hasty, resolute step with which John went on, not observing, apparently, that he was walking out before her. Not that she minded that; it seemed, on the contrary, quite natural. She liked him to forget

that he needed to stand on any punctilio with her. The wonderful thing was that Percy had done it all, and that a change had been wrought in John himself by that little curate. There was, then, a freemasonry among them, *too*. She walked on beside her lover, breathless, finding it a little difficult to keep up with him; and at length, when her mind began to get into working order again, broke the silence with a question.

‘Jack, what are you going to do?’

Whereupon he stopped all at once, and turned round upon her.

‘Elly! to think that I should have been thinking so much of you as almost to forget you were there! Percy’s right, that’s the truth. I must go away. I couldn’t be such a hound as to upset you and put you out with them, when there’s nothing more possible for the moment. I’ve got to go and work it out.’

‘To work what out—to go away when you might stay a week longer? Aunt Mary is not everybody. I will speak to my father,’ cried Elly, in the light of a new impulse. It was not at all a usual thing for anyone to think of going

directly to the rector, but yet in a great emergency it might be done.

‘No,’ said John. ‘Now that Mrs. Egerton knows, and all of them, it’s honest, Elly; that’s all I want. Don’t let us ask anything more. They shall never say I bound you to a nobody when you might have done so much better. You’re free, Elly; but you’ll stick to me all the same I know.’

‘Till I die—and after,’ she said, raising her face, which was a little pale, but ennobled with great and solemn feeling. She added after a moment, falling back to a more natural level, ‘But I can’t understand, all the same, why you should hurry off like this—why, for something that Percy said, Percy! you should change all in a moment and go and leave *me*.’

‘I’m going after you,’ said John. ‘You’re perhaps a long way off, Elly, but the road’s clear, and I shall be a little bit nearer to you every step I take. I’ll be a little bit nearer every day, please God. I’ve got the ball at my feet, Elly. I’ve never had time to tell you about it, to show you. There’s all the plans and calculations made out. Perhaps it needn’t be so

very long. I am not going to lose a day, not a day.'

'What is it, Jack? Something like what we used to talk of? oh, how silly we were! about the lighthouse——?'

'It's not a lighthouse, but the biggest job—Elly, it was you who put me up to it from the very first. It's your work as well as mine, and it's for you. And I've got the ball at my feet and the road's clear.'

CHAPTER XVI.

SUSIE'S SHARE.

SUSIE had never been so much made of, so watched over and attended to, all her life.

She did not quite know what to make of it all. First there was John arriving like a whirlwind, rushing upstairs to pack up his things, telling her he was going away at once, with Elly following, wistful, not quite understanding, it seemed, yet full of suppressed excitement. Susie suspected how it was, though she had not been told, and she had all a young woman's interest in her brother's love-story, and did not see any incompatibility as Percy and Mrs. Egerton did, but thought it very natural, as they had known each other all their lives. She was too kind to question Elly when she came into the parlour while John rushed upstairs.

The girl it was evident was much excited, sitting down one moment, getting up again, turning over the books on the table, looking out of the window, distracted, and not knowing what to do with herself, listening to the sound of his movements upstairs. Susie felt that he must be throwing his things into his portmanteau in the most dreadful confusion, and longed to run up and pack them for him, but did not venture to leave her visitor, or indeed to interfere. And it was not till some time had passed, and the tramping overhead became more and more lively, as if John was stamping upon his portmanteau to get it to close (which was exactly what he was doing) that Susie took it upon her to inquire.

‘I wonder why he is going away in such a hurry. Do you know, Miss Spencer, if he has had any telegram, any news?—if he is wanted at the office?’

‘Oh, Susie,’ said Elly, bursting forth all at once, ‘don’t call me Miss Spencer. I’m going to marry him as soon as we can: and it is because of that and Aunt Mary that he is going away.’

‘Because of *that*; but I should have thought—’ Here Susie paused in some perplexity, and looked her young companion in the face.

‘You should have thought he would have stayed longer, instead of hurrying away? Oh, so should I! but boys understand each other, it appears, just as you and I would do. It was Percy who said something to him. Percy is not a bit clever; and it was slangy and only half intelligible to me. “There are some things a fellow can do, and some he can’t,” that was all Percy said; and Jack just jumped up as if he had been stung and darted away. Aunt Mary was scolding, indeed,’ said Elly, glad of the opportunity of unburdening herself; ‘but what of that? she would have come round in time.’

‘Perhaps he thought they did not like it,’ Susie said.

‘What of that?’ said Elly, ‘when I tell you they would have come round in time!’ Then she cried, ‘Oh, forgive me, Susie, if I am not civil. I am so mixed up! So happy one moment, and then so perplexed, and not knowing anything about it. I thought I had it all in

my own hands. So I have, with a little time. Papa never resists me long, and as for Aunt Mary, she was coming round even when she was making the most fuss. When all at once this thing happens between the boys, and Jack pays no more attention to me.'

With this she began to cry a little, merely by way of distraction to fill up the time, for Elly was not at all given to crying. There was a sound in the midst of it as if John were coming downstairs, and then Elly immediately cried, 'Hush!' as if Susie had been the guilty person, and dried her eyes. But John did not come downstairs. He was still to be heard stamping and moving about overhead. And presently Elly resumed.

'He must be making a dreadful mess of his things,' she said, with a tone of resignation. 'So does Dick when he packs for himself, but Percy never. Percy is always neat—and yet to think it was he who said that!' There was again a little pause, both listening to every sound upstairs, Susie, puzzled and disturbed, not knowing what to say, while Elly, altogether absorbed in this new relationship, which was at

once authoritative and subject, could neither think nor speak of anything but Jack. There was not much of the confused rapture of a newly-developed love about her. Even at the first moment there had been something of the familiar sway of a sister in Elly's treatment of John, and now she was anxious, bewildered, not knowing what to make of him, feeling that he had gone out of her ken into a region influenced by a man's motives, not a woman's, which are different. Elly gave presently a glance at the clock, and took out her watch and compared it, then gave a sigh of relief. 'He is too late,' she said, 'thank goodness, for this train. He must wait till night now,' whereupon she became more composed, and her excitement calmed down.

But Susie did not know what to say in this curious position of affairs. To take this pretty young stranger into her arms and talk to her of all John's excellencies, and kiss her and cry over her with pleasure, as is the wont of a young man's admiring and sympathetic sister with his love, seemed out of place with Elly, whom she scarcely knew, who seemed to know John better

than she did, and who, in place of the emotional stage, was in the anxious one, rather regarding John as a wife does who is concerned about how her husband is going to act in a certain position of affairs which affects their well-being, than as a rapturous girl ready to find everything her lover does half divine. There was care instead of ecstasy on Elly's brow, and that little conflict of opinion which must take place sometimes between all properly endowed minds, even in the closest relationship, was in full force. She resumed after a time the discussion in which Susie could not take an active part.

‘Don't you think,’ she said, ‘that instead of starting off like this, to make his fortune—as if a fortune could be made in a day!—it would have been more sensible to wait and give them a little time?’

‘I am sure I don't know,’ said Susie, diffidently. ‘You are so young. You didn't mean to—to marry all at once, even if your papa gave his consent.’

‘Oh, no,’ cried Elly, with a blush and a laugh. ‘Oh, no; why, Jack's only just come of age.’

Susie accepted this information meekly.

‘Then, he had got your consent?’ she said.

‘Oh, yes,’ cried Elly, with fervour, ‘of course he had that all the time.’ And then the girl was seized with a little fit of that laughter which is so near tears. She grasped Susie suddenly by the arm. ‘Do you know,’ she cried, flaming celestial rosy red, ‘what happened when he went away? We kissed each other! I was only sixteen. It was four years ago. And I have sometimes thought that he never understood what had happened. But, of course, after that, when Jack asked me——’ She could not grow more crimson than she had done before, and her eyes filled with that golden dew of happiness and tears which makes the dullest eyes swim in light. This lovely softening and revolution in the girl’s face touched Susie. She put her arms timidly round her and kissed her cheek, to which Elly replied by flinging herself upon the comforting bosom of this new friend to whom she had now a right.

‘We’re sisters, don’t you know,’ she said. ‘I’ve only had Aunt Mary till now, and Aunt Mary’s so much older. Yes, of course, of course, he had my consent.’

‘Then what did he want more?’ said Susie, in her ear. ‘Dear, I’m of Mr. Percy’s opinion too. He has got to go away and do what he can to make it agreeable to your people. That is the only thing he could do—unless he had kept away altogether,’ Susie added, ‘which would perhaps have been the wisest way.’

At which Elly sprang up, and, seizing her comforter by both arms, shook her, first with wild indignation, then bursting again into the agitated laughter which belonged to her state.

‘Oh, you cruel—oh, you barbarous——’ she cried, and kissed her between. Then they started apart and turning round appeared demurely, seated close to each other in silence and attention, when John came in hurriedly with a bag in his hand pushing open the door.

It was of no use, however, as he was obliged to acknowledge. The night train which did not pass till midnight was the only one possible. As a matter of fact he did not go till next morning, subdued in his ardour of departure by a whole afternoon spent in the society of Elly, with whose freedom for that day nobody interfered. And indeed the afternoon was passed in a

somewhat strange way, in the parlour which was so connected with all the associations of John's youthful life, where he and she bending over the table with their heads close together went over the plans, of which John made a sketch for Elly's benefit, of the great scheme which he was convinced was to make his fortune. It was, let us say, the drainage of the Thames valley, than which there is no more urgently wanted piece of engineering, nor one which would bring a young man more fame and money.

John drew rude plans and diagrams of all kinds, while Elly looked on. He became enthusiastic in his descriptions, laying out everything before her, the manner in which the waste was to be carried away so as to do good and not harm, how floods were to be prevented, how the low-lying lands near the river were to be protected and utilised. John's eyes glowed as he set it all forth, and Elly said, 'I see!' 'I understand,' with sympathetic emotion and many a lyric of praise; but whether she did really see so clearly as she said, remains, perhaps, open to doubt. She believed, at all events, which comes to the same thing, and without being at all

humbled or troubled by her inability to fathom the expedients or comprehend the calculations. At sixteen she would not have given in so easily. She would have worked out the diagrams, and compelled herself to know what it was all about. But now she saw, after a sort, through John's eyes and was satisfied. He got perhaps more applause than was good for him from Elly, who he honestly believed followed all his elucidations, and from Susie, who understood none of them, and did not pretend to know anything save that he was very clever, the cleverest of engineers, a conclusion which, with deprecations, John was not perhaps altogether unwilling to accept. In this way they spent a few hours of such happiness as comes but rarely in youthful life. It was better than the more emotional rapture of the young lover's paradise, for it had so many finer elements in it to their own happy consciousness. Their life was to be built upon this grand work, which was a work which would save life, which would increase comfort, which would make wealth, not only to themselves but to others. It was the plan which had 'pleased their childish thought.' It was Elly's dream,

which she had transferred with all her girl's enthusiasm to the steady working brain, full of impulses more lasting than hers, and a training infinitely stronger, which had made that suggestion into a reality.

Thus the personality of each was flattered and charmed with the scheme that seemed to be in some sort the production of both. And Susie, who could not possibly claim any share, sat by and admired and applauded. She was as much delighted as they were. She had the additional advantage of being able to feel how clever they both were, how good it was that John was to have a wife who understood him, who would go with him in everything. Susie sat and beamed upon them from the heights of unselfish enthusiasm and delight, not with any effort to understand. Her mind had no need of that. Her part was to admire and love, which was easy, and suited her best.

Susie made no objections about remaining behind, when John thus rushed away. She was pleased with the village, the quietness, the retirement, the new friends; and, as has been said, she had never been so much made of, never met

with so many attentions all her life. The old gardener and his wife whom John had managed to pick up again, and instal as guardians of the house, according to his old dream, were in the first place her devoted servants, telling her all manner of stories about her grandparents, which were very pleasant to Susie; and then she had visits from everybody to comfort or to explain to her. Mrs. Egerton came, full of anxiety, appealing to her as a person of sense to say whether she did not think her brother far too young to take the serious engagements of life upon him—whether it was not a pity for a young man to tie a millstone round his own neck—whether she had ever seen an engagement turn out well that had been formed so indefinitely, where there was no likelihood of a conclusion to it for years? This was the tone Mrs. Egerton had now taken up: and indeed she was too much of a gentlewoman at any time to have troubled Susie with any hint of the inequality in family and circumstances, which she had pointed out so distinctly to John. And then Elly would come with her letters, to ask what news Susie had, and to talk about Jack and her-

self—herself and Jack, and what they had done when they were ‘young,’ and what now they meant to do.

Percy too had got a habit of ‘looking in’ when he came in from his rounds in the parish. He tried to interest Susie in parish work, and, indeed, did get from her a wonderful deal of information and help in the matter of the cottage hospital which he and the parish doctor were so anxious to get up—Percy, in order to get the sick poor to some small extent provided for, the doctor with perhaps the less virtuous motive of studying disease. She gave him a great deal of help, but that did not altogether account for the constant visits he paid her, nor the deferential tone in which he spoke, and the respect with which he received all her little opinions. On the subject of hospitals, it was true, Susie knew more than anyone else in the whole parish: but on others her opinions were timid and not at all self-assured. Yet with what respect this young man, who put aside Elly’s much more convinced and enlightened views, listened to the little which Miss Sandford had to say! He almost frightened Susie by the earnestness of his atten-

tion, frightened her, flattered her, in the end amused her very much, and made her laugh to herself in private at the new position she held, quoted and looked up to as in all her life she had never been before. Susie could not tell why. She was older than he was, and she understood his kind better than he understood hers, and had not in reality as much reverence for the type of curate as he had. But yet he came every day, and told her more about himself and his own life and thoughts than any one else knew, and brought her books which he was anxious she should read and tell him her opinion of, even going so far as to mark passages, in the eagerness of his desire to know what she thought on this and that point. It was not possible that Percy should refrain from all remark about John in these many and prolonged interviews, but the tenderness with which he treated Susie's brother was very different from the uncompromising views he had held on that subject before Susie appeared at Edgeley. He gave her to understand that if he interfered at all it was wholly in John's interest.

‘They would never be allowed to marry now;

indeed, I don't suppose they ever thought of that; and it seemed best for them not to let him lose his time here, and disturb his mind—don't you think so, Miss Sandford? A fine fellow like Jack, with everything before him.'

'But they say,' said Susie, in her modest way, 'that nothing is so good for a young man. It gives him something to look forward to, and a motive in his work. John is so much younger than I am. I feel more like a mother to him—'

'And so do I to Elly,' said the young man, with great gravity, 'who is just like that, much younger than I. And next to our own family I take an interest in Jack. He has done so well, and will do still better, I feel sure. And then he will understand what I meant. Miss Sandford, won't you come to the edge of the common and see the sunset? It is going to be glorious. I'll bring you home afterwards, and then, perhaps you will give a look at this which I brought to show you. I should so much like to know what you think.'

Sometimes Susie assented to this proposal, and would walk out pleasantly in the light of the declining sun, to see the sky all golden and

purple over the common, and all those peaceful sights of a country life, which are so wonderful and delightful to town-bred folk. She had no lack of companions, of escorts, of attendants at any time, and the air, that was so sweet and fresh, blowing over miles of green and blossoming country, and the friendly life of the village, and the tranquillity of the little house, and its sweet old-fashioned garden, was a refreshment to her beyond anything that heart could conceive. She thought regretfully of her mother, going on all the time with that stern routine which was all charity and succour yet at the same time business of the severest and most uncompromising kind. But Susie knew that the sweet rest she was taking would not be a possibility to her mother, and that the hospital was what suited Mrs. Sandford best. And she could not but think of John, whose name was on everybody's lips, and who had gone off with such an impulse of energy and faith in himself and his future : but afterwards returned again with a great deal of pleasure to the life around, which breathed so full of quiet and friendliness, and every pleasant thing.

She had another frequent visitor whom she received with almost more pleasure and sense of grateful esteem than any, and that was Mr. Cattley, who had not half so much to say as Percy, and yet seemed to feel in Susie's parlour—the room which he had known so well in other times, when it was full of the ways of the old people, but which now was Susie's parlour as if it never had belonged to anyone else—something of the same sweet calm and refreshment which the village life and quiet brought to her. Mr. Cattley knew the village as well as Susie knew the hospital: he wanted something more to refresh his spirit: and on the eve of going away from Edgeley, and breaking up all the old habits which had been his life for years, this new habit and association were more pleasant to him than it was easy to believe anything could be. He liked to sit and watch her, moving about, or sitting at work, or perhaps only looking up with a little interchange of simple talk. He told her when he got more familiar how long he had been here, and how little inclination he had to go away; and then he told her of his new parish, and its great unlikeness to this, and how

reluctant he was to plunge into it, feeling as if he were about to plunge into a new world.

‘It will not seem so when you get used to it,’ Susie would say.

‘No, most likely not. It is the getting used to it that is the difficulty,’ he would reply: and looked at her in an anxious way, as if the sight of her made a difference. He did not himself understand yet what the difference was.

When Percy came and found Mr. Cattley there, the new curate made it apparent in his manner that he thought the old one very much out of place. He would say,

‘Oh, I thought this was your day for the schools: but, of course, it is not important to keep that up now you are going away;’ or ‘I thought you said you would take the alms-houses this evening. If I had known you were not going I should have gone, for the old people don’t like to be disappointed:’ which was half-amusing to Mr. Cattley, but not pleasant, as the pupil’s attempts to instruct his former master seldom are. But what the old curate felt most of all was when the young man said to him: ‘I thought you had some business

with Aunt Mary ! I know she was looking for you.'

When this was said, Mr. Cattley took up his hat and rose from his chair, giving Susie a glance which she did not understand—and perhaps neither did he : and Percy would settle himself in his chair to remain, while Mr. Cattley went away.

CHAPTER XVII.

JOHN'S RESOLUTION.

JOHN'S feelings as he returned to town were very different indeed from those with which he had left London. Everything then was enveloped in a vague pleasure of expectation, a delightful doubt which was not fear. He did not know what he was to meet, how he was to be received, what changes had passed upon his old home and surroundings. All that was unascertained, in every way doubtful, making his heart beat with uncertainty, with expectation, and a pleasant mist of possibilities. But since then all had become clear—so clear! dazzling even in the distinctness of the light: and he himself had been suddenly lifted from youthful obscurity, and compelled, as he felt, to distinguish himself, to bring out all his powers without delay, to prove what he was. He was

not afraid of this compulsion : it exhilarated him rather with the delightful consciousness that he was equal to the undertaking, able for all that was demanded from him ; proud and glad to be forced to the front where he knew he could hold his place. But still it was a tremendous change—one that subdued him with its greatness even while it exhilarated and inspired him. Life had altered altogether. It had become a thing laid down on grand and noble lines, much greater and firmer than anything he had thought of, yet perhaps, by reason of being no longer vague, not such an altogether splendid and dazzling possibility. He saw before him what he was going to do. He was not going to conquer kingdoms, to deliver princesses, to subdue the nations like an old knight of romance, which is what in the mists of the morning every ambitious youth still feels possible, though the nineteenth century makes it expedient for them to laugh at all such fancies. John too had seen visions in which he enacted the part of St. George and encountered a modern dragon, with Elly looking on ; and the dream had been sweet.

But he saw things differently now. He was

going to slay no dragon. There was not indeed any monster to slay. What he had to do was to mature as rapidly as possible his plans, the great scheme which had occupied so much of his thoughts for months past, which he had been working out on paper, and building his future upon. It was, after all, the slaying of a dragon in the only practicable nineteenth century way; and perhaps the mediæval dragon meant nothing more than a great public danger which the knight-errant had to face and subdue and kill, or reform into an amiable and sociable monster, as could be done to the great river, which, a tyrant and destroyer sometimes, was at others the delight and help of man. All these ideas passed through his head as the train plunged along, with little interludes of lover-like dreaming and surprises of softer thoughts. He would recall to himself Elly on the common, as she looked when she had given herself to him, and next moment would be running over long lines of calculations in his mind, calculations made over and over again, which it was a satisfaction to prove and reprove, lest there should lurk any weak points in them.

How to perfect them in every final detail, to carry them to the firm, to demonstrate the greatness of the undertaking, the impossibility of failure—which, indeed, would at once be plain and evident to those skilled eyes, was to be his occupation now. After that everything would be plain sailing enough, he felt. He had meant to delay a little, to wait until he was himself a little more mature. But what did that matter, after all? He was only all the more adapted to superintend and carry out the work for being so young as he was. Young as he was he was a fully trained engineer, and already works of some importance had been committed to his hands. He was equal to any fatigue and any exertion in the carrying out of this, and there could be no doubt that he was the only fit person to work his own plan to completion. As a matter of fact he had no doubt about anything, either in the plan itself, or his capability of executing it, or its instant and entire acceptance by those who had so long been looking for something of the kind.

He had thus so much to think of, that when the quickening of speed, the suburban stations whirling by, and all the signs which announce a

near arrival at the end of a journey, made it clear that London was at hand, he was half sorry, and felt that he had not had half time enough for all he had to think about. He gathered up the two primary subjects of his thoughts as he did the books and newspapers which he had not read, being concerned with more pressing matters, and jumped out of the carriage with his bag in his hand with the sense that he had not a moment to lose. It was a long train, and there were a great many passengers, porters running about after the luggage, a crowd of cabs waiting; and in the hurry John strode along, intending to mount up upon the knife-board of an omnibus which passed the end of the street in which his lodgings lay. But it was not fated that he should do this so simply as he intended.

As he made his way through the crowd he met with an unexpected interruption. Some one called him two or three times in a voice which he remembered at once as somehow familiar, though he did not understand it for the moment. It was like a voice in a dream calling to him, though not by his own name? Was it

not his own name? With a slight start he remembered it and what it meant.

‘Mr. May—John May!’ cried the voice which became breathless with the hurrying of its owner towards him. John looked round, and saw close to him a figure which he had not seen for a long time; a tall man, taller than ever in consequence of his increased leanness and meagreness, with a tall hat, more shiny than ever by reason of extreme wear and shabbiness, and the glaze of poverty. John had seen very little of Montessor since the time when he had first made his acquaintance, on his arrival in town. From time to time a chance meeting in the streets had made it apparent to him that the poor actor’s hopes that his affairs would take a turn and that fortune once more would favour him, were not likely to be realised, as also that there were agencies at work which were likely to keep him down more than any spite of fortune. John, in his studious boyhood, keeping himself clear from all distraction, was not likely to be tolerant of any moral weakness of that description, and he had avoided the chance acquaintance who had come so suddenly into his life, but yet had never failed

when a meeting occurred to greet him kindly, and to ask after the child whom he had saved from injury. Now and then when Montessor's face looked more gaunt, and his clothes were more poverty-stricken and his talk more big than usual, John would send a present to the little girl, which he could see was eagerly accepted. There were times even when he would meet the poor actor two or three weeks in succession lingering about the end of the street where his lodgings were, and John had an understanding that the wolf was at the door, and that the five shillings he sent to buy little Edie a doll were probably of use for more serious needs: then perhaps for months or an entire year he would see the shabby figure in that hat which was always shiny, and the clothes which were always threadbare, no more.

For one thing, John, in his serious young manhood, had altogether outgrown the boyish petulance which had induced him to call himself May. Whatever had been the cause of his mother's abandonment of that name, he felt sure it must have been a just cause. He had gradually grown into a respect which was not either sym-

pathy or filial feeling for his mother and her decisions, and the hot boyish opposition to all she desired, which once boiled in his veins, was there no longer. In the gravity of twenty-one, which felt like ten years more after his studious and serious youth, he was willing to confess that he had been very foolish at the moment of grief and passion when he had left home and the tender care of the old grandparents, to enter upon life. And the sight of Montessor, and his appeal to him by the name which he had assumed for that moment only, always brought an acute pang of recollection and shame.

And yet he had never informed the actor that his name for ordinary purposes was not May. Something withheld him from any such confession—indeed, for that and other reasons he made his interview with the actor as brief as possible when he met him, and was glad to buy him off with that five shillings for Edie, though he had not always been rich enough to spare it easily. To-day he felt the call after him of ‘Mr. May—John May,’ more disagreeable than ever. There was no telling who might hear the respectable John Sandford addressed by that name, and explana-

tions are always difficult. He turned sharply round upon his doubtful acquaintance, raising his hand to stop the call.

‘Do you want me?’ he said, in a tone which perhaps was somewhat sharp, too.

‘Me young friend, I am delighted to see you,’ said Montessor; ‘it is ages since we have met. Let me help to carry your things, me excellent young hero—for such ye are ever to me. The chyild is well, and always remembers her deliverer—in her prayers, me dear May, in her prayers.’

‘Poor little Edie! I am very glad to hear she is well, and I hope you are as busy as I am,’ said John, with an uneasy smile. ‘I scarcely have a moment I can well call my own,’ a statement which was largely influenced by his desire to get away from any prolonged interview now. To tell the truth, Montessor, gaunt and shabby in his shiny hat, was not the sort of person with whom a highly respectable young man would care to be seen standing amid the crowds of a railway station in London, in what was still the full light of day.

‘Ah, me dear young fellow, ye’ve got a solid

occupation by the hand, thank ye'r stars for it; not a slippery standing upon the slopes of Art; be thankful for it,' said Montessor, with the air of consoling one of the inferior classes for his disadvantages. 'In me own profession, though ye may mount up to the skies, ye are likewise exposed to all the tricks of fortune, that jade: and malice and spite may drive ye down to the depths, where, alas! Montessor is now.'

'I am very sorry,' said John, 'but you had an engagement?'

'I had—an engagement: but the conspiracy that's pursued me from me youth has once more coiled its meshes about me feet. Ah!' cried Montessor, with a sort of hissing through his teeth, 'if I could but hold the heads of that hydra in me hands and crush them for ever! But let us not speak of that,' he continued, with a fling over his shoulder of some imaginary burden. 'Let's not speak of that: it disturbs the pleasure of this friendly meeting and does no good, John, when, me dear young friend, it's a pleasure beyond telling among all our own troubles to see an example of success and prosperity in you.'

‘Yes, I have got on very well,’ said John, half mollified, half impatient; ‘but I have a great deal to do. I am rushing home now to see after some plans.’

‘I’ll walk with you,’ said Montessor, ‘for though I’m not the well-known man I once was, me young friend, to be seen with Montessor will do ye no harm.’

‘I’m not going to walk—further than the omnibus.’

‘Then I’ll go as far. It’s not friendship moves me this time, me young friend, though for friendship to my chyild’s deliverer I’d go further still. I told ye I knew a man of your name, a poor fellow that got into trouble long ago. He’s been in seclusion, poor man, for his country’s good, don’t ye know? Poor devil! and he’s what the French call a good devil, too, poor wretch—a kyind creature—one that would give ye a share of his last crust—ay, and do a thing for any man that asked him, without considering if it was according to the law or not.’

‘That’s awkward,’ said John, ‘a man should draw the line at that. It doesn’t do to go against the law.’

‘No, it doesn’t do—that’s what it is. The case may be as bad as ye please, hard or unjust or—but ye mustn’t go against it. That’s what poor May can’t be got to see, poor devil : and he is terrible poor, and he’s got no friends.’

‘I am very sorry, Mr. Montessor : but I don’t see that I can do any good.’

‘No, but being of the same name you might find a way. Me young friend, t’would be a real charity. For the thing is he has a family, but don’t know where to find ’em. It’s a pitiful story : and you’re of the same name. Now give me a little of your attention, me young benefactor, for that ye are and always have been. It isn’t much that’s in Montessor’s power now. But, look ye, if I could find this poor devil’s friends and put him in kind hands, I’d be happy with the sense that I’d done one good action : and, me dear May, oh, me dear young May——!’

‘What does it matter,’ said John, ‘that I’m of the same name? What can I do? I could give you a few shillings for him, that’s all I could do.’

‘The shillings,’ said Montessor, ‘are not wanted yet. There’s money enough as yet.

But if his own friends were to take him back he might be kept from harm, and where he is he'll be in trouble again before a month's out. Me dear friend, among the Mays ye belong to isn't there one that's gone wrong? Isn't there one that's disappeared out of ken. Think, me boy, me dear boy, it's the saving of a fellow-creature, it's the delivering of a soul !'

The actor stood still in the middle of the pavement to say this in his most impressive tone, and John perforce stood still with him, his bag in his hand, his coat on his arm, and confusion and annoyance in his face.

'No,' he said, 'I know nobody. I've—no relations of that name. Pray let me go. I've a tremendous evening's work before me. I can't really, so far as I'm aware, be of the least use to your friend.'

'Think it over,' said Montessor, 'think it over. Ye've too good a heart not to help if ye can. Think it over, me dear May. I will tell me wife and me chyild I have seen ye, which is what they always hear with pleasure—with pleasure,' he said, with emphasis.

The actor looked very poor, very thin, very

bare of everything. His appearance suddenly struck John as they stood side by side in the crowded street. The omnibus was already in sight, bearing down upon him with its freight of men. John was very eager to escape, to get to his own business, to plunge into the plans which he so confidently expected were to bring him fame and fortune. But it suddenly occurred to him what a contrast to his own confident youth was this poor man at the other end of life, who had made his try and failed : and who out of the depths of his poverty and downfall, was pleading for another who had failed more bitterly than himself. The pathos of it struck John in the midst of his impatience to escape from it, and his natural youthful disinclination to have painful matters which he had nothing to do with, thrust upon him like this. He hated it, he was impatient of it, he longed to escape and feel himself in face of his own success which he held to be so certain ; but a certain glistening wistfulness in the actor's eye, and his reluctance to be left behind, and the shabbiness of his garb and aspect altogether, moved John's heart in spite of himself. The young man adopted that

expedient which is so general, with which most of us are so willing to buy off distress and free ourselves from the sight of misery. He took out one of his few sovereigns—for though he was sufficiently well off he did not abound in money—from his waistcoat pocket.

‘I have not seen Edie for a long time,’ he said, ‘and she must want much bigger dolls now than the one she used to be so fond of. Will you give her this for me, and tell her to buy something with it. And I’ll come and see her soon. Here’s my omnibus. I am sorry I can’t do anything for your friend. Good-bye.’

‘God bless ye,’ said the actor. ‘Ye’re always the same fine fellow. Edie will bless ye, me brave boy. But think over the other case that I’ve told ye of. Think it over, and good-bye, and be sure ye come. We’ll look for ye, and Edie—— Good-bye. Good-bye!’

John did not care that even the people on the omnibus should see the shiny hat which was waved to him with so much enthusiasm. But there was nobody he knew, and presently, as he bowled along, his former thoughts came back to him and he himself forgot this interruption

which was only momentary. Montessor's friend, whose name was May, attracted but little his preoccupied mind. There had, indeed, been a time when it might have excited him, when he had been so anxious about the mystery of his childhood that anyone bearing that name would have roused his attention. But that phase was altogether over. If he ever thought of his boyish visit to Liverpool, and the mayor whose name was May, and all the anxiety he was in to affiliate himself somehow, it was with a smile of mingled self-ridicule and shame. Nothing now could make him anything but John Sandford, which was as truly his name as any name could be, which he had made known as that of a young man sure to rise, one who had the ball at his foot and before whom the way was clear.

He was doomed to interruptions, however, that evening. He had just settled down to his work after a hearty meal, laying out his papers upon the table and disposing himself to a last inspection of all his calculations and diagrams, when his landlady, a woman who had the greatest respect for John, tapped seriously, with a tap that evidently meant something, at the door.

She came in, when John bade her enter, with a grave face.

‘Mr. Sandford,’ she said, ‘there has been two men here asking for you as are not your sort at all. One is like a poor gentleman as has got into trouble, and the other’s no better than a rough off the streets. They’ve been here twice asking to see you. I don’t know if they’ve anything to do with the works. Once they was both the worse for liquor. I don’t like to have such folks seen at my door.’

‘I know nothing about them,’ said John. ‘I certainly expected no such visitors. Did they say what they wanted?’

‘They wanted the gentleman as lived here. When I asked if it was Mr. Sandford, the old gentleman, he gave a sort of a cry, but he was that weak on his legs he could not be very clear in his head, I don’t think : and then they commenced again, and they said as you’d been kind to them, and they wanted to see you. And if you’ll peep out of the window behind the curtain you’ll see them coming along the street. And kind or not kind, Mr. Sandford (though I know you’re a good-hearted young gentleman), they

ain't the sort of folks, take my word for it, to be coming to a respectable house.'

John glanced from the window, as he was told: and there he saw approaching the two men whom he had encountered on the steps of the office the night before he went to Edgeley—the tramp whom he had already come in contact with several times before, and the man who had gone to sleep against the closed door, and whom he had rescued and taken to safe lodgings for the night. He had forgotten the adventure in the press of other thoughts, but now it came all fresh to his mind.

'Oh, these men,' he said. 'Yes, I do know them, though I don't know who they are. If they want to see me, let them come in, Mrs. Short, for once.'

'If I were you, sir, I'd send them half-a-crown, and say as you were too busy, and better they should come no more.'

'Well, I *am* very busy,' said John. He hesitated for a moment, looking at his papers, thinking the half-crown would be well expended: and then another sentiment moved him which he could not explain to himself, a curiosity, a melt-

ing of the heart. Here was some other direful failure; a crash still worse than Montessor's and Montessor's friend—while he, John Sandford, was so strong in youthful success. 'No,' he said, 'poor souls, I'll see them. Let them come in, this once.'

CHAPTER XVIII.

A PHILOSOPHER.

THE two men came in, the first with a somewhat downcast shamefaced air, the other with the impassiveness of the man who cannot be less thought of than he is, and who has neither pretensions nor hopes; yet it was Joe who was the first, and who encouraged his apparently uncongenial companion to enter.

‘Don’t you funk it,’ said Joe, ‘if any one’ll help you, he’ll do it. This gentleman,’ he added, addressing John, who was looking at them across the table covered by his papers, with a slightly impatient look, ‘is my mate, sir, as I told you on; him as you was so kind to, t’other night. He wanted for to thank you for all your kindness: and there’s—there’s another thing or two——’

‘I suppose he can tell me himself what he wants,’ said John.

The other man stood crushing his hat between his hands, looking at John with deprecating eyes, in which there lurked a smile, as though he was conscious how ludicrous it was that he should be thus introduced under the patronage of this strange companion. He said now,

‘That might be a little hard. But I can at least thank you, sir, for the kindness of the other night.’

‘It was nothing,’ said John, confusedly. ‘Won’t you sit down? It was very surprising to see a—a person like you——’

‘In such circumstances and such company, you would say? For the circumstances—yes; but, for the company, it’s the best this world can give any man, the company of a faithful friend. Joe’s not very polished, and if he’s clever it’s perhaps not in a laudable way: but he’s faithful. I believe he’ll never forsake me, sir. He’s as faithful as if I were a prince and he a knight. A poor pair of nobilities we’d make. You needn’t say so. I can see it in your eyes.’

‘I hope he is as faithful as you think,’ said John, ‘but——’

‘But me no buts,’ said the stranger, ‘if I give up Joe, I give up everything. I have nothing but Joe to trust to. Oh, yes, he’s faithful: for if he weren’t I should sink into ruin altogether. Don’t say anything against him—he’s all I have.’

The speaker gave John a look—which he thought more pathetic than anything he had ever seen, and which went at once to his heart—a look which betrayed a knowledge of Joe and of all that was in John’s mind concerning him, and of the unstable foundation on which his confidence reposed. The pathos and the wistfulness and the humour that were in it betrayed to John’s mind the existence of a sort of passionless self-conscious despairing, such as he had never glimpsed at before, or believed in the possibility of. Joe was this poor wretch’s only prop, but in his heart he knew Joe better than anyone else, and was half-amused in the depths of his desolation that he himself should still be capable of this human clinging to the only being who stood by him. This was what his

eyes said to John's. Joe's faithfulness was a sort of woeful jest to him, yet his poor sheet-anchor, too.

‘Have you no relations?’ John said; he could not tell why, for what right had he to question this unfortunate man?

‘Relations,’ said the other, ‘are not fond of a man in my circumstances. You know where I’ve come from, I believe, sir, and what I am. May I ask you what made you so kind to me—the other night?’

John looked at Joe, who stood behind looking on, his eyes prowling round in a sort of hungry investigation. The other had drawn a chair to the table, and seated himself, but Joe stood looking about him, like a predatory animal examining if perhaps there might be something to devour.

‘Would your friend mind,’ said John, ‘if I were to ask him to step into the hall?’

The stranger gave a keen glance towards the door.

‘If there is nothing of value there,’ he said, quickly; then, with a change of his tone, ‘Joe, my good fellow, take a little walk outside. I seem to want to have a sentinel or I can’t

rest. Just go and walk about a bit outside.'

Joe gave another predatory glance around, and then with a nod of his head withdrew.

'I'll come back,' he said, 'in 'alf an 'our. If I walks about, some bobby or other will be after me. They don't never let a poor fellow alone.'

The stranger gave John one of his humorous looks.

'Such is the effect of prejudice,' he said.

It was impossible that any position could be more strange. This unknown criminal, this discharged convict, of whom all that John knew was that he was a convict, and had no friend but Joe, seated himself opposite to the young man familiarly at John's own table, with a twinkle in his eye and a grotesque sense of all that was ludicrous in his own circumstances which was entirely bewildering to a young man not used to mental phenomena of any kind. The man was dressed in clothes of an old-fashioned cut (most likely such as had been quite fashionable and appropriate, John thought, in the days when he was shut up in prison), but still perfectly correct and respectable, and there was in his aspect nothing of that unfamiliarity with comfort and decency which

was evident in his companion. This person drew in his chair to John's table with the ease and freedom of one to whom a tidy bourgeois parlour was usual and natural. Perhaps he might have been accustomed to better places—certainly not to worse. How the episode of the prison had affected him, John wondered vaguely, but at all events there was nothing visible of that association. He was able to make a good-humoured joke of it—a joke which concealed, was it philosophy, was it despair? He settled into seriousness, however, as the door closed upon Joe, though the smile was never far from his eyes—and repeated, with a slight curiosity,

‘You were very kind—that night. To find myself in a decent house, in a soft bed, was wonderful. I couldn't help wondering why you should take such an interest in me.’

The eyes which were so expressive gave a wistful, almost imploring look in John's face, as if the man had some suspicion, or rather hope, that John's motive was other than that of mere charity. The young man was bewildered by this look, and by a something, he could not tell what, that was sympathetic and familiar in the air of

the stranger. Sympathetic! and he was one of the criminal class, a returned convict! John's mind was full of confusion, perplexed beyond measure by the influence which he felt to affect him in spite of himself. But, though he was angry with himself for yielding to it, he could not resist his strange companion's eyes.

‘It does not seem becoming in me, at my age, to speak so to a man of yours,’ he said. ‘But when I saw you, helpless, with no one but that—ruffian——’

The twinkle lit up again in the eyes of the other; he put up his hand in deprecation.

‘Be gentle,’ he said, ‘with poor Joe.’

How was it possible to maintain the air of a virtuous superior with this smiling criminal? John was more and more abashed and embarrassed.

‘I thought,’ he said, ‘that if you had time to look out—for your real friends——’

‘It was simple charity, then?’ said the man, with a faint sigh: and then he smiled again. ‘At least it was a kind thought. You wanted to deliver me from the evil connections into which you thought I had fallen, in coming out, for lack of better. It was a very kind thought.’

John felt himself draw a long breath, almost a gasp of astonishment and relief and utter confusion of mind. He had felt himself the benefactor, doing indeed a very kind action, something that perhaps not many men would have done : and he was altogether taken aback by this generous appreciation of his good motive.

‘You were right enough,’ said the other, ‘quite right if I had been a more hopeful subject. But you’re too young to know all the ins and the outs of it. I have no real friends. Joe may, or may not, be faithful, poor fellow, but he’s the only human creature who sticks to me, and I am used to him. It was a kind thought on your part, but one that couldn’t come to anything. I partially divined it, so I left the place. I could not enjoy the clean sheets and the tidy room under false pretences ; no less thanks to you, my young friend.’

‘But——’ said John, ‘you are not surely going to let yourself sink ? you, a man evidently of education, of sense, of understanding——’

‘Sink—to what ? Can one sink any deeper ? I had all these things when I went—wrong, as people say. If they did not prevent me then,

how do you think they are going to stop me now ?’

John could do nothing but gasp and draw his breath, and stare at this calm statement. The speaker, after a moment’s pause, looked at him closely, and said,

‘ You knew nothing at all about me then, what I had done or where I had been ?’

‘ How should I ?’ said John.

The other laughed a little.

‘ How should you indeed ? but I had a kind of a hope you might. You don’t even know what I did to get myself into such a scrape ? It was nothing brutal like poor Joe’s.’

‘ I wish,’ said John, ‘ you would not tell me any more : if I can help you to work to keep out of the mire, I will do it ; but if it is only how you fell in to it, why should I know ? I don’t want to know.’

‘ Why, indeed ?’ echoed the stranger, ‘ and yet one has a sort of desire to tell. After all, you know, after thinking it over in every possible light for fourteen years, I cannot see the absolute sin there is in writing another man’s name. On the face of it, it’s no great

thing—not so much as telling a lie, which anybody does without thinking. It's only a more formal sort of a lie. Offences against the person are evident crimes ; to injure another man, to put him in danger of his life, to give him pain, that I can understand ; or to rob him of what is perhaps his children's bread. But to write his name instead of your own ! I have had a great deal of time to think of it. I cannot see, after all, the criminality of that.'

'It's one of the worst of crimes,' said John, 'it strikes at the root of everything. Why, forgery——'

'Yes, give a dog an ill name,' said the other dispassionate thinker, 'call it forgery, and it becomes a bogey and frightens everybody. And yet, after all, apart from the motive, it's the simplest action. Then there's the other thing, drink—which is so often the first step (I hope you have no leanings that way, though I seem to excuse it—for, right or wrong, it's ruin)—well, there's no sin, you know, in that. Wine's not vice, nor even whisky. No one will tell me that to take two, three, or indeed any number of glasses of anything is vice.'

‘Excess is vice,’ cried John. He felt himself reddened with indignant fervour. The idea that any man could sit by him calmly and look him in the face and defend the indefensible—take up the cause of vice and criminality: he could not believe his ears. The criminal generally (so far as he was aware, especially the drunkard, of which kind the young man had seen in the way of his work some fine examples) is too apt to be unctuous in his repentance and quite uncompromising in his denunciation of his vice. To hear a man in this calm and apparently reasonable way discuss it as an open question was entirely new to him.

‘Excess is—excess,’ said this philosopher, ‘very bad for you, in whatever way you consider it; for the stomach and the constitution, also for your prospects in life, to which it is destruction;—that’s indisputable. But how far you can be said to break the moral law—To be sure you may take higher ground or lower ground. You may say that whatever obscures your brain and makes you incapable of reflection and thought, which is the spiritual side of the question; or, on the other hand, whatever visibly interferes with

your comfort and destroys your career—But that last is mercenary,’ he added, with a wave of his hand, ‘and things that are mercenary and based on self-interest belong to a lower class of motives altogether ; not what we were discussing at all.’

‘There is nothing to discuss that I can see,’ cried John. ‘All that you say is a mere confusion of plain right and wrong. To forge another man’s name is to sin against your neighbour ; and drink is a sin against—yourself, and everything that’s sane and rational. You own yourself it’s ruin ; and it’s degradation and misery and everything that’s dreadful. I have seen it among the men——’

‘I never said anything about the penalties,’ said the other, waving his hand again. ‘They’re innumerable : but they’re irrelevant. The penalties are enormous. Drinking is not in the decalogue at all, you’ll acknowledge that. But if you consider consequences (which, however, I protest are irrelevant), there’s nothing, not even murder, that is punished so. It makes a wreck of everything—a young fellow’s looks, and his health, and all he stands upon. He pays for his

glass with everything he has in the world. You may even steal without being caught for years: but if you drink you lose everything: there's no escape for you and no hope. All that is true. Still it isn't the sin that lying is, or cheating, or bearing false witness. These things are all in the commandments, but not drinking. So far as I can see, and I have had a great deal of time to think, we're paid out for that in the present world. It's not left over like the rest for—the other place, sir, the other place.'

'If you'd seen what I've seen,' cried John, with honest, youthful fervour; 'the harm it has done—oh, not to the brute himself, I don't care a farthing for that! but to the helpless wife and children,—you would know better than to hesitate for a moment as to whether drinking is a sin.'

'If I'd seen what he's seen!' cried his strange companion, with that wonderful twinkle in his eye. The humour in it was tinged with the profoundest tragedy, though John, in his indignation, failed to see it. He began to laugh low to himself with a curious quiver of sound in his

throat. 'I've done more than see it. I've done it,' he said: 'broken the hearts of everybody I cared for in the world. You don't know what I am. I am a man that have had a wife and children, and perhaps have still, for aught I know. I made them pay for my whisky, God knows I did: and myself, too—but that's neither here nor there. As for the brute himself, as you say, who cares a farthing for him? I took it out of them and made them pay for it. But now they've shaken me off, glad perhaps to get shut of me. And if they're living or dead I don't know, and where they are I don't know. That's one of the penalties. I should know all about that, if any one does: I'm no neophyte—I'm a man well instructed. But all these are consequences,' he added, slowly. 'They're irrelevant. They don't touch the principle. What you say I've gone over a thousand times. It's juvenile, it's elementary: it doesn't touch the question at all: on which he thinks, bless us all—though he's scarcely out of swaddling clothes—that he knows more than I!'

John was daunted, and he was impressed by the terrible story thus lightly glanced at. He

did not know what to say. What he faltered forth at last was the question of a child in the midst of an exciting story.

‘And don’t you know where they are? and can’t you seek them out?’

If the stranger’s feelings had been affected before, he seemed to have got the better of his emotion now.

‘Do you remember,’ he said, ‘in the Sermon on the Mount, how the unkind children say it is Corban, a gift, and so get rid of the old people? That’s how they’ve done with me. It is Corban, a gift. I’m not penniless, though I’m friendless. There was a sum of money waiting for me when I came out: and that was all.’

‘But you could inquire; you could search for them: you could——’

John felt his sense of right and wrong confused by this narrative. Suspicion, offence, indignation, righteous anger at all these sophistries had succeeded each other in his mind. Now there came over him a great wave of pity. In every such story he had ever heard of (he did not realise that he had never heard such a story at first hand) there had

always been some devoted wife or sister or child waiting to receive the miserable offender, some sorrowful home ready to take him in. That was always the most pathetic situation, the saddest picture. But the dead blank of this—a sum of money waiting for the unhappy man and no more, no one to take him by the hand or give him hope, was tragedy indeed. It made his heart sick, and filled him with a confused relenting and compunction and eagerness to do something—to help, where no help was.

‘Why should I?’ said the man, with his strange smile. ‘I daresay she has brought them up very creditably, poor children. I should like to know something about my little boy: but it would be no advantage to him, would it, to find his long-lost father in me? No, I’ve got below that, or above it, if you please. I content myself with Joe—poor Joe,’ here he broke into a tremulous laugh, ‘whose truth you don’t believe in, but who’s always been faithful, after his sort, to me.’

John was greatly moved, more moved than he could have thought was possible out of mere sympathy and pity.

‘Oh,’ he cried, ‘don’t content yourself with Joe. I’ve no right to give you my advice, but since you’ve come to me and told me all this— When I took you to those lodgings that night, it was because I wanted to try to get you to think—to get free of such company. Don’t be content with Joe; you will only fall into—you will only be led into——’

✓ ‘Drink,’ said the other. ‘Very likely: and that’s all right. I should have been dead long ago if I hadn’t been kept from it by force for years. Now I’m old, comparatively, as the newspapers say. And it will make short work. All the better. That’s the only thing I’m good for now.’

‘Don’t say that,’ said John, with moisture in the corners of his eyes. ‘You are not an old man yet. Do something better than that. Work at something. I’ll help you if I can—I’ll——’ He paused, for this was a tremendous thing to say, and such a risk to run as took away the breath of a young man so absorbed in his own pursuits and determined on succeeding. He paused, and the flush of a sudden struggle came all over him, a rush of blood to his brain,

a conflict of thoughts which filled his head and his ears with a clamour as of armies meeting, and then he continued, with a vehemence which was not in his ordinary nature, a burst of generous youthful impulse unlike the ordinary wisdom and self-restraint of his sober youth, 'I'll be a friend to you instead of Joe!'

The convict—for he was a convict, however he might explain his offences away—gave John a smile which was like sunshine, and lit up all his face. But then he shook his head.

'I am not going to accept that,' he said. 'No, no—I am no friend for you. But it's true the money will not last for ever—and I ought to do something if I am to go on living. I don't know what, though. They taught me a trade down yonder, but——' he broke off with a smile. 'I don't know what I am good for otherwise.'

'I'll tell you,' said John, in his fervour. 'You shall come and copy these papers for me. I am out all day, and you can do it here. I can show you what I want in half-an-hour. They are plans I have been making out: I've done them on all sorts of scraps, and they must be clearly copied. I hope they'll make my

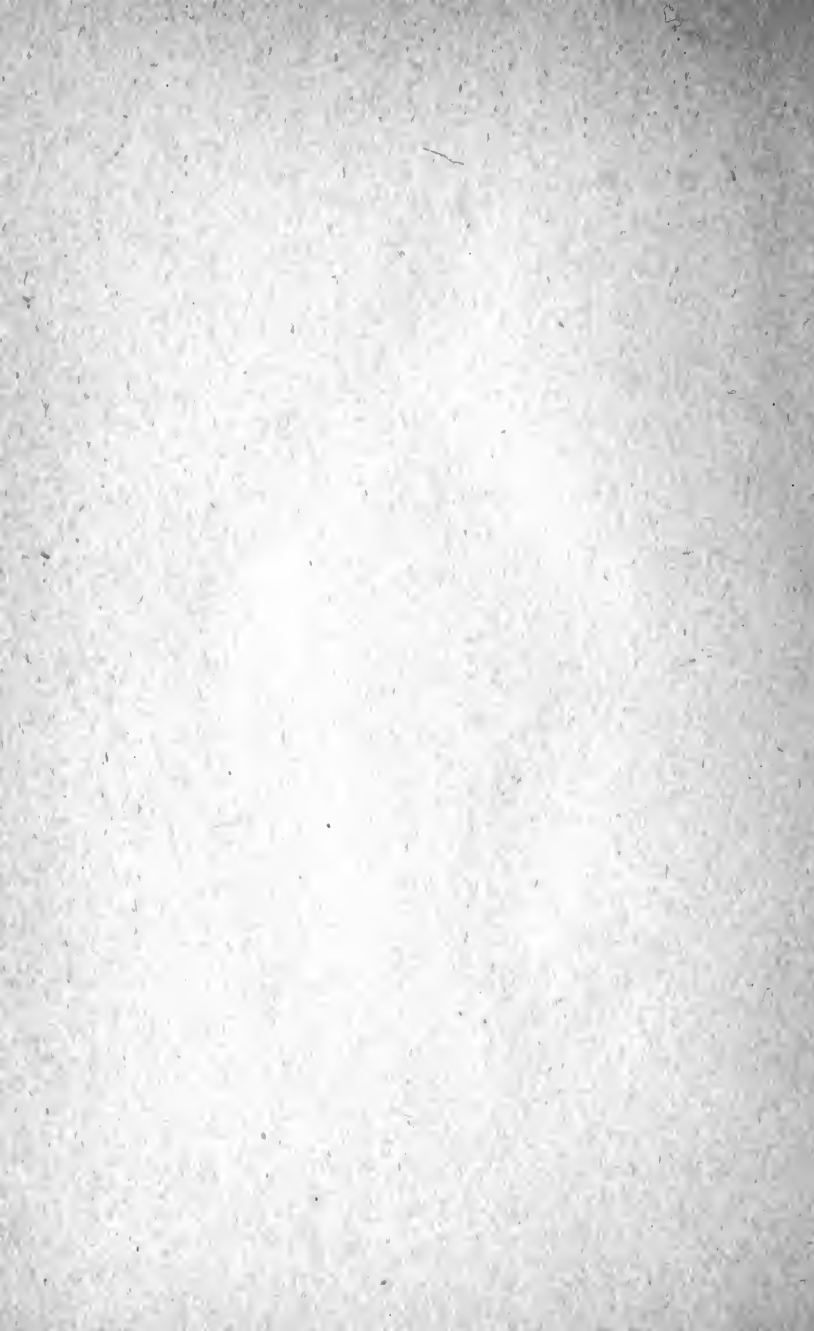
fortune,' he said, after a moment, with a touch of boyish simplicity, 'and then perhaps I'll be able to do something more, something better for you.'

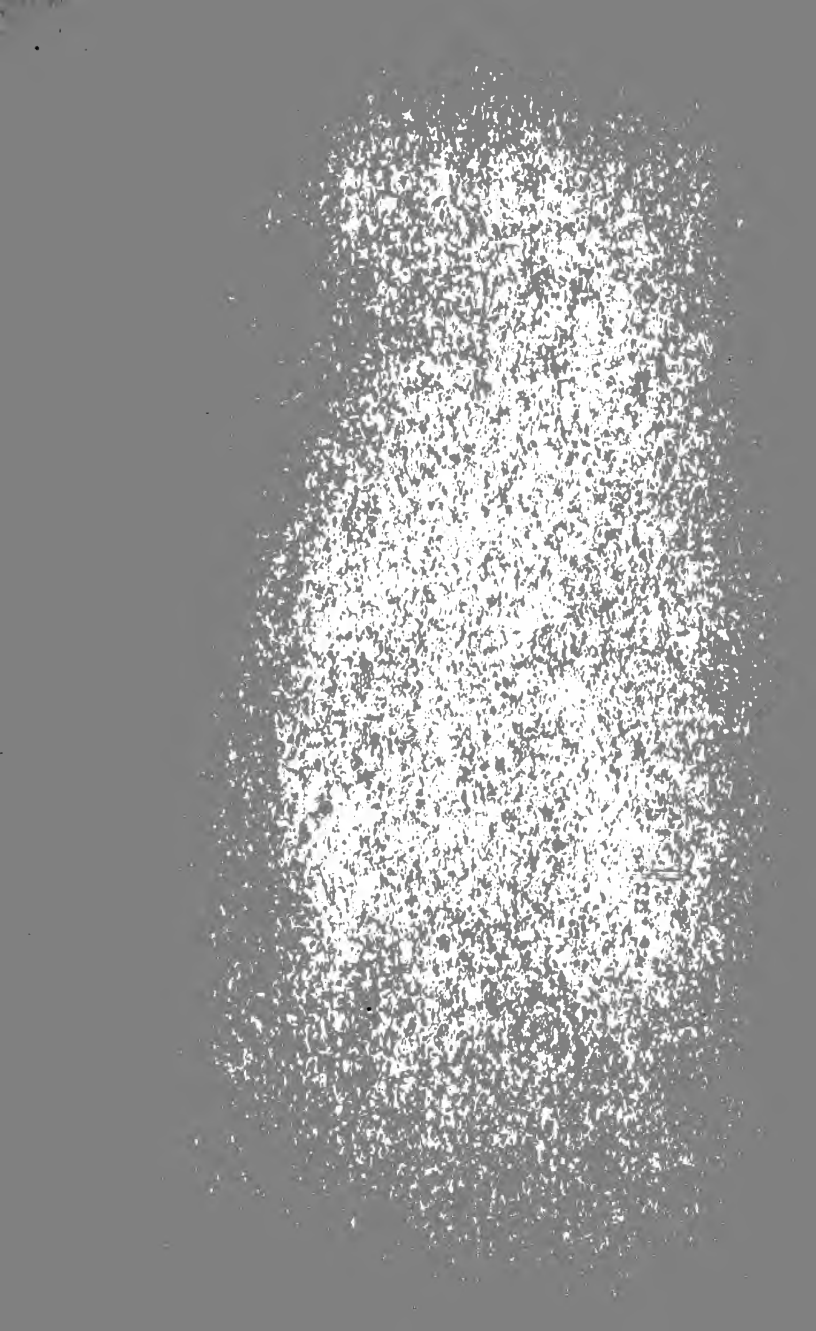
He did not observe in the warmth of his interest that Joe had come in while he was speaking, after a faint knock at the door. Joe entered softly, still with that hungry look in his eyes. He had been more than half-an-hour gone, and he was very anxious to know what those two had been talking about all this time. The words he caught as he came in raised this curiosity to the fever point.

'They'll make his fortune,' he repeated to himself, looking at the table and all the papers with his wolfish, predatory eyes.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.











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